CMC: The Next Generation

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A series of one-shots on the adventures of five fillies (a flightless Pegasus, a snobby unicorn and a set of energetic triplets) and their quest to discover what makes them special and earn their cutie marks. A spin-off of "Daughter of Discord."

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A New Beginning

So this will be a series of one-shots, maybe two-shots, for when I'm stuck on my multi-chapter fics. This is a sort of spin-off from *Daughter of Discord.* If you'll remember some of the OC's I created, I wanted to expand on them. The cover art was courtesy of Nstone53.

Prism woke up screaming to the sound of a whistle.

"Rise and shine, rookies!" her mother shouted. "We have a big day today and we're not going to waste it in bed!"

Her brother groaned as he pulled a pillow over his head.

"Ten more minutes..."

Their sister shook her head in pity. They knew better than to keep their mother waiting. Rainbow Dash blew her whistle again, this time, right in Thunder Dash's ear. The fifteen-year-old shrieked and fell out of bed.

"Save your laziness for afternoon naps!" their mother ordered. "It's your little sister's first day of school and you two have to take her!"

Lightning Dash, Thunder's twin, grumbled. "We wouldn't have to take her every day if she could..."

"Talking back, eh? Both of you! Drop and give me twenty! With legs!"

The twins whined, but obeyed their mother and began their twenty push-ups.

Prism rubbed her eyes wearily. Today was her first day of fourth grade, which meant goodbye summer, hello early morning exercises.

Once the twins were done with their push-ups, Rainbow blew her whistle and the three siblings hastened into a line.

"Run in place!" she ordered. "Now!"

They hurriedly jogged in place.

"You call that running?!" Rainbow shouted in Thunder's ear. "I've seen Tank run faster than you!" She turned to the tortoise that was sitting on Prism's bed. "No offense, pal."

Tank responded with a slow nod.

"Now on your hind legs! Go!"

The twins did this action with ease, but Prism wobbled as she stood up and fell back on her rump. Rainbow sighed and helped her youngest daughter up.

"Run!"

Prism panted as she attempted to run on her hind legs, trying her best not to fall over again.

"Now drop and give me twenty wing-ups! Go!"

The twins quickly moved to their position in perfect synchronization and pushed their bodies up with their wings. Prism simply dropped down onto all fours. She stretched out her tiny wings and flapped them at the pace her siblings went for wing-ups.

"Faster!" Rainbow commanded.

Prism squeaked and frantically beat her wings.

"Faster! Do you want to be a Wonderbolt or not?!"

"No, ma'am!" the filly piped. "I mean yes, ma'am!"

"Good! Now, the whole routine again! Get back up and run in place!"

They did five sets for each exercise and while the twins were only a little out of breath, Prism was panting hard and dripping with sweat.

When both your parents were Wonderbolts, there was no escape from physical activity.

"Great job, kids!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed. "Now stretch out your muscles while I go wake your lazy father out of bed!"

As their mother flew out of the room, the twins stretched out their strengthened wings.

"Is she our Mom or our drill sergeant?" Thunder wondered aloud.

Lightning huffed as she extended her foreleg across her chest. "Slave driver's more like it. We don't have to go to school anymore, so why do we have to wake up so early?"

"Yeah! Why can't she or Dad take Prism to school?"

"It's not our fault she can't fly!"

Prism wanted to scream that she was standing right there, but she knew it was pointless. As she did her stretches, she reflected on the harsh reality of her life.

Both her parents were Wonderbolts, part of the greatest aerial team in all of Equestria. Only the strongest and fastest of flyers were admitted into that group, which is why Rainbow Dash trained her children long and hard so that they may one day follow into her hoofsteps. The twins actually had a shot of achieving this goal. Not only were they able to fly before they could walk, but they already worked together as a team. They now had a job with the weather crew, particularly for thunderstorms.

Prism was not anything like them. She was nine years old and she still could not fly. Her wings were too small to carry the weight of her body, and that too was small for her age. If she did not have her mother's multi-colored mane and her father's green eyes and light blue coat, she would think she was adopted.

Every pony in her family was an accomplished flyer, so why was she so different?

Rainbow's whistle called the three down for breakfast. Soarin had

prepared them flapjacks, Prism's favorite.

"There's my big girl!" the stallion exclaimed, kissing Prism on the forehead. "Fourth grade! You've got to stop growing, kid!"

"Dad!" the filly giggled, pushing him away.

Despite her inability to fly, Prism was her daddy's little girl. Although she told every pony she was embarrassed by it, she secretly enjoyed being the center of her father's attention. It was the one area where her siblings did not excel.

The Dash family was a colorful bunch, mainly because of Rainbow Dash's multi-colored hair. The twins had inherited that hair in a peculiar way. Lightning's mane was orange and yellow, with a thin streak of red in the middle of her head. Thunder's was blue and black, with a streak of purple. Both their manes were wild and thrown back like their father's. They had his light blue coat and their mother's violet eyes. Indeed, it was easy to tell they were all related.

"You have everything packed?" Soarin inquired his youngest daughter.

"Mmm-hmm," Prism replied, though her mind was on other things.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," Rainbow Dash said. "As you already know, Aunt Rarity's moved back to town to re-open Carousel Boutique, so Gemstone will be in your class."

"Mmm-hmm."

"I know you think her snobby, but I'll bet she's scared about her first day, so make her feel welcome."

"Whatever."

"Okay, we're here," Lightning Dash gruffly announced. "Now get off."

Prism slid off her sister's back. "Thanks a..."

But the twins had flown off without saying goodbye. This did not surprise the filly, for this always happened.

She looked out at the schoolyard and saw the fillies and colts playing. She recognized them all from last year and winced at the memory of all the names she had been called. Then she caught sight of three fillies over by the merry-go-round. The three were identical with their poofy hair styles and their blue eyes. The only difference between them were their colors. The one spinning was blue with a mane of the same color, only darker. The two riding had the same color scheme, but one was red and the other magenta.

Seeing them calmed Prism's nerves and she race over to them.

"Hey, Tri-Pies!"

The blue filly brought the merry-go-round to an abrupt halt and the triplets looked over at the foal running towards them. Their mouths broke into bright smiles.

"Prism!" they shouted in unison.

She realized too late that calling out to them was a mistake when they all leapt onto her in a dog pile.

"We're so glad you're here!" the blue one called from on top. "Aren't we, Raspberry?"

"You bet we are, Blueberry!" the magenta filly replied. "Right, Cherry?"

"Right!" the red one piped.

Prism grunted as she struggled to pull herself free. The Tri-Pies were her best friends, but they were just as eccentric as their mother, who had a reputation of being the most random pony in Ponyville, possibly Equestria. The only other beings who could measure up to her craziness were her husband Red Shoes and Discord. The triplets were a year younger, but they had started school early and were in the same class as Prism.

"Guys, I need to breathe!" she shouted desperately.

"Sorry!" they cried as they jumped off their friend.

"Are you excited?" Blueberry Pie inquired.

"Cuz we're excited!" Raspberry announced.

"We've never been so excited!" Cherry added.

"Except for our first year of kindergarten!"

"But really!"

"What can top that?"

They continued talking rapidly and finishing each other's sentences to a point where it drove Prism nuts and she shouted:

"Okay, okay!"

The three silenced and looked at the pegasus in concern.

"You alright, Prism?" Raspberry asked.

"You look a little blue," Blueberry said.

"So to speak," Cherry snickered.

"It's nothing," Prism grunted.

"Did you hear the news?!

"We're getting a new student this year!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"And guess who it is!" Raspberry urged.

Prism sighed. "I give up."

The trio squealed and began to tell her. "It's..."

The school bell interrupted them. Prism rolled her eyes, knowing what was to come.

The Tri-Pies gasped dramatically and jumped up and down.

"School! School! School!" they chanted.

"Okay!" Prism screamed, herding the bouncing triplets inside the red building. "How 'bout we get to class before Mrs. Cheerilee gives us detention?"

They gasped dramatically again.

"Detention's *not* fun!" Blueberry spat.

"Nope!" the other two agreed, shaking their heads.

They hastened inside and to their seats. The Tri-Pies always filled the row up front while Prism sat in the back, slouching and hoping no pony would notice her. While her head was down, she caught sight of the flank of the pegasus colt in front of her.

"Kicks?" she uttered. "You got your cutie mark?"

The green colt with red hair turned to look at the filly. He glanced down at the picture of the boxing glove on his rear and then back up at Prism. He gave her a smug grin.

"Yeah, this summer," he said. "What about you, Penguin? Got yours yet?"

"Nope," Prism groaned. "And my name's not Penguin."

"Really? 'Cuz you've got a lot in common with penguins. After all, they," he laughed as he spread out his wings, "can't fly!"

The filly gripped the edge of her desk, wanting to strangle the colt, but she was snapped back to reality by the tapping of a ruler on Cheerilee's desk.

"Class, please take your seats," the teacher gently demanded. "I trust you had a wonderful summer, but now we must resume our learning experience. I am proud to say that we have a new student joining us this year. Now, I want you all to be nice to her. She just moved from Canterlot."

The classroom atmosphere filled with a lot of "oohs" and "ahs."

Kicks gave a long whistle.

"One of them Fancies," he uttered.

Cheerilee smiled and called out the door. "You can come in now, honey."

Prism did not see the filly at first, but she did notice Kicks and the other colts dropping their jaws and drooling. She stretched her neck to get a view, but could not see over Kicks' fat head.

"Every pony," Cheerilee announced, "I'd like you all to meet your newest friend...Gemstone."

Prism tumbled out of her seat, causing every pony's heads to turn to the back. When the pegasus stood herself up, her mouth fell open at the sight of the unicorn filly. There was no mistaking her white fur, her delicately curled dark blue mane and matching eyes.

As if she did not have enough problems.

"Well, Gemstone," Cheerilee said, breaking the silence, "you can sit next to Prism today, as you already know each other."

As soon as Prism was in her seat, she sank deep into it, hoping to disappear. She did not even look at Gemstone as she sat beside her.

"To start off," Cheerilee said, "why don't we go around and share what we did over the summer? Who wants to go first?"

Prism perked up and eagerly raised her hoof.

"Yes, Prism?"

"This summer," the pegasus said proudly, "I helped defeat an army of changelings that tried to take over Equestria!"

There was a long silence. Then the class roared with laughter.

"Yeah, right!" Kicks exclaimed. "I'm sure you really picked a fight with them! I'm sure you did a sonic rainboom too! Oh, wait. You

have to fly to do that!"

"It's true!" Prism insisted. "Ask the Tri-Pies! They were there!"

"Indeed-a-rooni!" Cherry piped. "We exploded those meanie changelings with our party cannons!"

"And Daddy smushed them with our giant bunny!" Blueberry declared.

"But in the end, true love conquered all!" Raspberry finished.

The class laughed harder.

"Children, please!" Cheerilee commanded.

Prism tried to make herself as small as possible. Then she turned to Gemstone, the only foal in the room, other than the Tri-Pies, who wasn't laughing. Instead, she was silently gazing down at her folded hooves

"Gemstone!" Prism pleaded. "You know what happened! Tell them!"

"Yeah, go on, sweetie!" Kicks taunted. "Tell us!"

The unicorn glanced up and blushed when she saw that all eyes were on her. She glanced around the room and then at Prism.

"I..." she muttered. "I don't know what you're talking about."

The pegasus sent her a glare and made sure Gemstone had received it before turning away from her entirely.

"Cherry Bomb!" Cherry Pie called as she bounced the ball high in the air.

Her sisters and Prism scrambled to catch it, but in their efforts they collided into each other. The ball landed outside of the four chalk-drawn boxes.

"Ow!"

Gemstone rubbed her head. "Watch where you're throwing that thing!"

"Sorry," Cherry giggled. "We're playing by the Europonian rules! You know, from Europony!"

"Europony?"

"Of course I'm a pony, silly!"

"You wanna play, Gem?" Blueberry asked.

"It'll be fun!" Raspberry exclaimed.

"It's *four* square," Prism snapped, "not *five* square!"

"Come on, she can play!" Cherry insisted. "She can just wait until one of us gets knocked out!"

"But I don't know how to play," Gemstone explained.

"It's easy!" Blueberry declared. "There are four positions. Right now, I'm the King, Prism's the Queen, Cherry's the Knight..."

"And I'm the Court Jester!" Raspberry squealed.

"The object of the game is to eliminate the others from the court. Usually you have to hit the ball into some pony else's square, but we're just passing it for this one. Just watch us play and you'll get it! Since I'm the King, I start. Remember, no pass-backs!"

The blue pony bounced the red ball across to Raspberry's square. She passed it to Prism, Prism passed it to Cherry and so on. After a few more passes, Raspberry got the ball, rushed to the middle and called:

"Baby Cradle!"

The other three hastened to the center and laid their hooves on the ball. Cherry was the last one to reach it.

"Oopsie!" she snorted cheerfully. "Looks like I'm out!"

She moved out of her square, allowing Raspberry to move in.

"Now I'm the Knight," the magenta filly explained to Gemstone, "and you're the Court Jester."

The unicorn scoffed. "I, a Court Jester?! Why can't I be the Queen?!"

Prism rolled her eyes. "You have to earn it!"

"It works like this," said Blueberry. "If I get eliminated, I go out, Prism becomes King, Raspberry becomes Queen, you become the Knight and Cherry goes in as the Jester. If Prism goes out, Raspberry's promoted to Queen, you the Knight, Cherry the Court Jester. If Raspberry goes out..."

"She gets it, already!"

"If the ball bounces twice in your square," Raspberry said, "or bounces in your square first and then goes out, then you're out. There are also a lot of tricks you can do to get some pony out."

"Like Cherry Bomb!" Cherry Pie cheered. "That's my favorite! It's when you bounce the ball really, really, really high!"

"My personal favorite is Disco Ball! That's when we all gotta dance!"

"And you'll get the rest as we go along," Blueberry said. "We'll go easy on ya."

The blue filly bounced the ball to Gemstone's square and she caught it feebly. She glanced between the fillies, not sure what to do. After a pause, she tossed it to Raspberry.

"Silly!" Raspberry snorted, passing it back to her. "You're supposed to *bounce* it! Try again!"

"Ugh!" Gemstone whined. "This game is hard!"

"Then maybe you shouldn't play," Prism mumbled. "It would make every pony's lives easier."

"Maybe you should be the Joker, Prism!" Blueberry laughed,

nudging the pegasus in the side. "Just bounce it in Rasp's square. Come on, Gem! You can do it!"

The unicorn cringed as she weakly did what the blue filly commanded. Raspberry grinned and tossed the ball into the air.

"Disco Ball!" she cried.

"What?" Gemstone asked.

The others danced in place. Blueberry was doing the moonwalk, Raspberry was doing the worm, while Prism was begrudgingly moving her hips from side to side. The unicorn just stood there in confusion.

"Come on, Gem!" Cherry shouted from the sidelines. "Shake 'em!"

"Shake what?" Gemstone pleaded.

Raspberry looked up and gasped. "Gem! Look out!"

"Huh?"

The unicorn shrieked as the rubber ball landed on her horn and deflated.

"Oopsie!" Raspberry giggled. "Guess I miscalculated that throw!"

"Great going, Gem!" Prism groaned. "Now we don't have a ball!"

"Aw, it's okay!" Blueberry insisted. "We can get a new one!"

"Whatever," Gemstone grunted as she shoved the flat piece of rubber off her horn. "I didn't want to play this silly game anyway."

The unicorn turned her back on the group and stomped away in a huff.

"Canterlot snob," Prism muttered.

"Why didn't you tell me Gemstone was gonna be in my class?"

Prism demanded.

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes. "I told you this morning, but you didn't listen!"

"But why? Why *my* class?"

"Your school is the only one in Ponyville."

"Then homeschool me!"

"I don't get why you're so upset. I thought you and Gemstone were friends."

"No, we're not! She's prissy, rude, and a Canterlot snob!"

"Hey! Your Aunt Twilight, the princess, happens to be from Canterlot! Not to mention Rarity's lived there for about a decade now."

"Okay, so Aunt Twilight and Aunt Rarity aren't all snobby, but Gem's just impossible! You know she said I was uncouth?! What is uncouth, anyway?"

"Now look here! I don't want you talking that way about any kid of any of my best friends, okay? And I don't want one of my own kids acting like she's better than every pony else!"

Prism was taken aback by this. "What?! No! It's Gemstone who thinks she's better than every pony, not me!"

"Well, you acting the same way makes you no better than her! While we're gone, I expect you to be nice to Gemstone."

"Wait. You're leaving?"

"Our summer vacation ends this week. Your dad and I have to perform with the Wonderbolts. But don't worry. Aunt Scootaloo will be here to watch you guys."

This lifted the filly's spirits up. "Aunt Scootaloo's coming?"

"Yep. She and the band have finished their tour and I asked her to come down here for a few weeks."

Prism jumped up and down. "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh! Aunt Scootaloo's the most awesomest pony every! After you and Dad, of course."

The idea of her favorite aunt coming to visit made her feel a lot better, but it still did not change the fact that she would be sharing a classroom with some pony she disliked.

As the week went by, Prism kept her distance from Gemstone. It was not easy, because the unicorn sat next to her in class and no pony would switch seats with her. The Tri-Pies would also invite her to play with them. She would often refuse, because most of their games involved getting dirty. When she did play, Prism would ignore her.

One day, they were all playing Monkey in the Middle when Kicks showed up and started laughing at them. The five turned to the pegasus colt in confusion.

"And what are you laughing at?" Prism demanded.

"I'm sorry!" Kicks exclaimed, though his tone clearly indicated he was not. "I just find it amusing that all the blank flanks are playing together!"

The pegasus filly put her hoof on her hip. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Don't you know? The five of you are the only ones in the class who don't have their cutie marks yet!"

"So what?" Cherry shrugged.

"We are the youngest in the class," Blueberry pointed out.

"That's no excuse for Penguin here!" Kicks scoffed, looking toward Prism. "Actually, it's no wonder she doesn't have a cutie mark,

considering she can't even fly!"

Prism cried out and the Tri-Pies had to hold her back to keep her from strangling the colt.

"Let me at him!" she shouted, lashing out her hooves. "Let me at him!"

Kicks laughed again and turned to Gemstone. "What's a pretty filly like you doing hanging around these losers?"

Gemstone looked between the fillies and Kicks. "They're my friends."

"We are not your..." Prism started to scream, but was interrupted by the colt.

"You could play with us, instead! Or rather, since we're playing basketball, you can be our cheerleader!"

The unicorn blinked. "Cheerleader?"

"It's not hard. All you have to do is look pretty and cheer for our team."

"Well," Gemstone said, shyly running a hoof through her mane, "I can look pretty"

"But what about our game?" Raspberry asked with a pout.

"Um, uh...later."

The Tri-Pies watched in disbelief as Gemstone followed Kicks to the basketball court. Prism only scowled.

"I knew we couldn't trust her," she grunted.

"Oh, I'm sure she just wants to play with some pony else for a change," Blueberry insisted.

"That jerk called us blank flanks!"

"But Prism," Cherry said, "we *are* blank flanks."

"Yes, but he didn't have to rub it in our faces!" She glanced at her bare behind. "Bad enough that I can't fly, but he has to pick on me for this too?!"

"We're in no hurry to get our cutie marks," said Raspberry. "These things happen when they happen."

"And we can't fly either," Cherry pointed out.

Prism looked at the trio wearily and then back at her flank. "I'll show him! I'll get my cutie mark! And it'll be even more awesome than his!"

Prism was surprised to see who was waiting to take her home. It was not one of the twins, nor her parents. Standing at the gate, the crook of her foreleg leaning against the post, was an orange pegasus with a wild purple mane and dark violet eyes decorated with black eyeliner. Around her neck was a spiked collar and she wore a motorcycle jacket to go with it. This made her look twenty percent cooler than she already was.

"Aunt Scootaloo!" the filly cried, picking up the pace.

"Hey, Rainbow Junior!" the mare exclaimed, welcoming the filly in for an embrace.

As she took Prism in her forelegs, she ruffled her multi-colored mane.

"I haven't seen you since the Grand Galloping Gala," said Scootaloo.

"Yeah, you and the CMC rocked that party!" Prism cheered.

"And you've sure grown since then. How are those wings doing?"

The filly sighed. "Still a flightless bird. Are you flying me home?"

Scootaloo raised an eyebrow. "Fly? Kid, when are you going to learn that my way is the only way to travel?"

She pointed to the purple scooter leaning against the fence. It was a simple scooter with orange flames painted on the side, but Prism was in awe of it. Scootaloo tossed her a helmet while she strapped on her own. The mare stepped onto her scooter and gestured for the filly to hop on.

"Where to, RJ?" Scootaloo asked.

"Sugar Cube Corner!" Prism exclaimed eagerly.

"Got it! Hold on to your hooves!"

Scootaloo flapped her wings rapidly and pushed her hoof off the ground to get the scooter started. Prism held on tight to her aunt's waist as they got going really fast. Even though Scootaloo was not technically her aunt, she was still the awesomest pony in all of Equestria!

Pinkie Pie no longer worked at Sugar Cube Corner, since the Cake twins were old enough to run the store and the Tri-Pies made the place crowded. Instead, she and Red Shoes opened up their own shop called The Party Palace, where they sold party supplies and novelty items.

That was why the pink mare was not there to greet them at the bakery, but an adolescent unicorn with an orange mane.

"Oh, Scootaloo!" she exclaimed. "Good to see you again! How was the tour?"

"Oh," the pegasus said with a shrug. "You know. Good times, bad times. We did run into a buffalo stampede on our way to Appleoosa. They thought our bus was some sort of evil spirit. I told Sweetie Belle we shouldn't have made it look like a bunny!"

"Wow. That must have been exciting! Why don't you have a seat? What can I get you two?"

"The usual, Pumpkin," Scootaloo said, leaning back in her chair.

Pumpkin Cake nodded and went into the kitchen.

"So how have things been at school?" Scootaloo asked Prism. "I hear Gemstone's in your class now."

The filly grunted. "Yeah."

"That must be fun."

Prism pounded her hoof on the table. "Fun?! She's a real pain in the flank! Not to mention a dirty double-crosser!"

"Whoa, whoa, girl! What's this all about?"

Once Pumpkin Cake had handed Scootaloo her chocolate milkshake and Prism her rainbow fudge sundae, the filly explained what had happened at recess that day.

"She went to play with that jerk who had just called us blank flanks! And he called me a penguin! Again!"

"Gee, do I know what that feels like," Scootaloo said as she sipped her milkshake.

"But I'm going to show that dip face! I'm going to get my cutie mark and he'll be the one crying once he sees how amazing it is! I'm also gonna learn to fly too!"

"Slow down, squirt. Your wings aren't ready yet. As for your cutie mark, that takes time too."

"But I don't have time! I don't want to be known as the filly who was last in her class to get her cutie mark! I'll get mine before Gemstone!"

"Prism, listen to me. Life's not a competition. Okay, maybe it's got a little competition, but something like this doesn't happen overnight. You'll get your cutie mark and be able to fly in time, but that time is not now."

"But Mom was the first in her class to get her cutie mark! So were the twins! And they could fly before they could walk! Do you know how embarrassing it is to come from a family of flyers and to not be able to get off the ground?"

Scootaloo sighed. "You'd be surprised."

Prism tilted her head in confusion. "What?"

"I mean my family wasn't renowned for their flying, but I was a lot like you at your age. I was a blank flank too and my wings were too small to get me off the ground."

"What?" Prism said again. " *You* were a blank flank too?"

"Every pony's born a blank flank. Some ponies, like you and me, are just late bloomers. I was upset at first, but after a while," she spread out her wings, "my wings grew to their full size," she glanced at the red scooter on her flank, "and I discovered my special talent."

"How?" the filly begged, leaning forward. " *How* ?!"

"I had a little help." Scootaloo grinned. "Do you know why Applebloom, Sweetie Belle and I named our band the Cutie Mark Crusaders?"

Prism thought for a moment and shrugged. "It sounds cool?"

"Well, yeah, but the three of us became friends because we were the only ones in our class without cutie marks. Then we started our own secret society so that we would help each other earn our cutie marks. Even after we got them, the name sort of stuck. You know, your brother and sister were Cutie Mark Crusaders too."

The filly scratched her head and then her face lit up in realization. "Oh, yeah! I remember!" She pouted. "They hardly ever let me into their clubhouse! Wait. Is that clubhouse still there?"

"It should be. It belongs to the Apple family though, so if you and your friends want to use it, you'll have to ask them first."

Prism stood up from her chair. "This is great! I'll get the Tri-Pies and together, we'll earn our cutie marks! Then Kicks will have one less thing to tease me about!"

"Now take it easy, RJ. I know you're excited and all, but remember, no matter how hard you try, you just can't force..."

"Yeah, yeah. So when can we go see the clubhouse?"

Scootaloo shook her head with a laugh. "You're a lot like me, you know that, kid? Before we go, I have to tell you the secret and you must promise not to tell any pony outside the Cutie Mark Crusaders."

Intrigued, Prism leaned in closer. "What is it?"

When Applejack answered the door, she was cradling her weeping pony-dragon infant in her hooves.

"Hush now, Applespike," she whispered. "It's naptime. Go to sleep."

She looked at the four fillies apologetically. "Be right back."

She shut the door and returned a minute later empty-hooved.

"Sorry, gals. Spike's runnin' errands in town and the kids are buckin' apples with Big Macintosh, leavin' me with the baby. If ya think an ordinary foal would be a hoof-full, try tendin' one that's half dragon!" She sighed as she wiped the sweat off her brow. "So what can I do y'all for?"

"You see, Aunt Applejack," Prism said, "the Tri-Pies and I were wondering if we could use your clubhouse."

"We're going to start our own secret society!" Raspberry piped.

"To earn our cutie marks!" Blueberry shouted.

"Shush!" Cherry whispered. "That's supposed to be a secret!"

Applejack chuckled. "Well, this seems familiar. Sure, y'all can use it. Cinnamon Roll can take y'all to it. She's over there yonder."

She stiffened as smelt something burning. "Whoa, nilly! He burped again! Excuse me, girls! I gotta get the fire extinguisher!"

Once the country mare had disappeared into the house, the four

fillies walked up the hill to where a brown filly a few years older than them with platinum hair was bucking apple trees.

"Hey, Cinnamon Roll!" Prism cried.

The older filly turned to them with a smile and spoke in an accent that was not quite southern but had a hint of it. "Howdy, girls! What brings you around these parts? Come to get some apples?"

"Actually, your mom said we could use your clubhouse. See, we..."

"Want to be Cutie Mark Crusaders?" Cinnamon Roll finished with a smirk. "Was wonderin' when you gals were gonna come around! Follow me!"

She led them down the hill and through some trees, until they came across an old treehouse. It was not in its best condition, with the paint peeling away and the shingles sliding off the roof, but it was still standing strong.

"Now," Cinnamon Roll said, "did any pony tell y'all about the secret compartment?"

Prism nodded. "Aunt Scootaloo told me this afternoon."

"Then I guess my work here is done. I gotta get back to the orchard. Have fun, y'all!"

The older filly trotted off, leaving the younger fillies to stare at the clubhouse.

"It's so...old!" Cherry said with a cringe.

"So...tiny!" said Raspberry.

"So..." Blueberry said, her frown turning into a smile, "awesome!"

The other two grinned in agreement. "Yeah!"

The triplets zoomed forward and up the steps, running over Prism in the process. After spitting the grass out of her mouth, she followed the Tri-Pies into the treehouse. They all gazed at it in awe.

"Lookie, lookie!" Blueberry cried, gesturing to a drawing on the wall. "A map of Ponyville!"

"And a thinking spot!" Raspberry piped, pointing to a target on the floor.

"And a judging table!" Cherry exclaimed as she appeared behind a podium. She put on a serious face and slammed her hoof on the wood. "Order in the court!" Then she giggled. "This place is so cool!"

"This is going to be so fun!" Raspberry shouted, jumping up and down. "We're going to be Cutie Mark Crusaders!"

"Hold it, guys!" Prism said. "We have to find the secret compartment first."

"What is this secret compartment anyway?" Blueberry inquired.

"If she told you," Cherry said, rolling her eyes, "it wouldn't be a secret now, would it?"

"Aunt Scootaloo said it's the place where all the secret Cutie Mark Crusader stuff is kept," Prism explained, her eyes scanning the clubhouse. "Aunt Applebloom built it years ago, and it can only be opened using..." She gazed up at the lantern hanging above the thinking spot. "This!"

The pegasus leapt up and tried to reach it, but her hoof did not even make it close to touching. She tried again, but her jumps were too short. *Ugh!* she cursed to herself. *I hate being little!*

After several more attempts, Cherry Pie coughed and moved in front of her.

"Watch and learn."

Cherry glanced up at the lantern, crouched down low and shouted, "Cherry Bomb!"

With a loud *sproing!* she leapt up like a bunny rabbit and grabbed hold of the lantern. Her weight caused it to drop down with a *click!* The others turned around as they heard the sound of gears turning.

A small door opened in the wall, revealing a cubby filled with...

"Stuff!" the Tri-Pies cheered, racing toward the cubby, thus knocking Prism over again.

"Wow!" Blueberry exclaimed, pulling out an array of red capes. "Check these out!"

"And this!" Raspberry said, withdrawing an old book.

She blew the dust off the cover, causing the three of them to sneeze simultaneously.

" *The Cutie Mark Crusaders Memory Book* ," Raspberry read.

"I found another one!" Cherry said, waving another book in her hoof. "It says *The Cutie Mark Crusaders Rule Book* !"

"Let me see that," Prism said, snatching it from the red filly.

The pegasus opened the book to the front page and the triplets gather around her as she read:

" *Fellow Blank Flank,*

Congratulations on finding our secret stash with ease. The only reason you were able to find this is because a current or former Cutie Mark Crusader told you of its location. We started this club, because we were like you once. Unlike most fillies and colts, we were late in earning our cutie marks and we didn't think we were special because of it. We joined forces and helped each other in discovering our special talents. We're not going to sugar-coat it. It will be a long and tedious process, but if you all help each other, you will make it.

Inside this compartment, you'll find capes (which you can make more of if necessary) and a memory book filled with the adventures of past Crusaders. Be sure to have new adventures and put them in this book.

To get started, you'll find the newly revised Cutie Mark Crusaders Pledge on the next page.

Remember, you are not alone.

Sincerely,

Applebloom, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo ."

"Wow!" Cherry marveled. "That must have been written like a hundred years ago!"

Prism rolled her eyes as she turned to the next page. "Okay, so all we gotta do is say the pledge and we'll officially become Cutie Mark Crusaders!"

"Ooh!" Raspberry piped. "This is so nervi-citing!"

"What does the pledge say?" Blueberry demanded. "What does the pledge say?"

Cherry leaned over to read it. " *I, insert name here* ..."

Prism put her hoof to her head. "You're supposed to say your name, Cherry!"

"Oh, right. I knew that!"

"Okay, do you guys want to go one at a time or do you want to do it together?"

"Let's do it together!" Blueberry insisted.

"Things are a lot funner when we do them together!" Raspberry nodded.

"I agree!" Cherry exclaimed.

"Very well," Prism said, placing the book down. "Raise your right hoof and repeat after me."

The triplets obeyed with a smile.

" *I, Prism* ..."

" *I, Prism* ..." they mimicked.

"Your *own* names!"

"Your *own* names!"

Prism shook her head, but had an idea and tried again.

" *I, Blueberry, Raspberry and Cherry* ..."

" *I, Blueberry, Raspberry and Cherry* ..."

"... *blank flank* ..."

"... *blank flank* ..."

"... *hereby pledge to be loyal, caring, respectful and honest to my fellow Cutie Mark Crusaders* ."

"... *hereby pledge to be loyal, caring, respectful and honest to my fellow Cutie Mark Crusaders* ."

" *And to never give up* ..."

" *And to never give up* ..."

"... *never surrender* ..."

"... *never surrender* ..."

"... *to those who have shunned me and belittled me for the bareness of my behind* ."

The triplets snickered as they repeated this.

" *I will wear my cape with pride and keep the secrets of the Cutie Mark Crusaders within the walls of the clubhouse until the day I earn my cutie mark* ."

" *I will wear my cape with pride and keep the secrets of the Cutie Mark Crusaders within the walls of the clubhouse until the day I earn my cutie mark* ."

Prism put her hoof down and the triplets followed her movement.

"It's official!" the pegasus announced, grinning widely. "We are Cutie Mark Crusaders!"

Just to be clear, the Tri-Pies are the daughters of Pinkie Pie and my OC Red Shoes, Gemstone is the daughter of Rarity and Fancy Pants, and Prism is the youngest daughter of Rainbow Dash and Soarin. I think of the foals I created in *Daughter of Discord* , Prism was my favorite and I found her an interesting character to expand upon. And yes, in this universe, Applejack is married to Spike and they have a cross-breed baby named Applespike along with two adopted foals named Cinnamon Stick and Cinnamon Roll. This is supposed to be about twenty years or so after the events of the show.

That four square game was based on the rules my friends and I played, and yes, we bounced the ball instead of hitting it.

I liked writing this, because it's more light-hearted compared to the other stuff I've been writing recently. Also, this older version of Scootaloo kind of reminds me of my own aunt. Don't worry, I haven't given up on *Twelfth Night* . This was just a break, but there will be more one-shots in the future.

Odd One Out

What can I say? I felt like doing another!

Prism picked up the pace as she neared the old treehouse. Thanks to their Aunt Applebloom, it was newly renovated and painted, this time with a rainbow roof and pink walls. When she reached the entrance, she found the Tri-Pies on the floor, huddled around a book.

"Ooh!" Cherry piped, pointing to a picture in the book. "Is that Mommy?"

"She's so pretty!" Raspberry marveled.

"And she's in a giant lettuce!" Blueberry exclaimed. "Cool!"

"What are you guys looking at?" Prism asked.

The triplets looked up and replied in unison, " *The Cutie Mark Crusaders Memory Book!* "

"There's a lot of cool stuff in here!" Blueberry declared. "Look!"

She held up the book to Prism's face. On the page was a group photo of four fillies in red capes: two earth ponies, a pegasus and a unicorn. They were all standing in front of the clubhouse, their hooves on each other's shoulders.

"See?" Blueberry said, pointing to the yellow earth filly with the big red bow. "That's Auntie Applebloom, the unicorn's Auntie Sweetie Belle and the pegasus must be Auntie Scootaloo! I don't know who the other filly is, but she looks familiar."

Prism squinted and read the caption underneath: " *The Cutie Mark Crusaders welcomes their newest member: Babs Seed.* Oh, I know who that is! I saw her at the last Apple Family Reunion! She's Aunt

Applebloom's cousin, I think."

Blueberry turned a few more pages. "And look at this!"

The picture on that page showed a bunch of new foals wearing the same capes and standing in front of the clubhouse. Four were fillies, two were colts. Prism recognized the two pegasi in the middle as her brother and sister. She figured that the yellow filly standing shyly next to Thunder Dash was Apple Blossom, his current girlfriend. She also spotted their unicorn friend Dinky and Cinnamon Stick, Cinnamon Roll's older brother. There was no guessing who the earth pony with spiral purple eyes and propeller hat was.

"I was thinking," Blueberry announced, "that since we're Cutie Mark Crusaders now, we could take a group photo and add it to the memory book!"

"That's a great idea!" Prism declared. "That way generations of Cutie Mark Crusaders can look back and see how awesome we were!"

"Ooh!" Cherry chimed, bouncing up and down. "That'll be fun!"

"Let's go tell Gemstone about it!" Raspberry insisted.

The pegasus filly's face fell. "Gemstone?"

"She is joining us, isn't she? I mean she's a blank flank too! Besides, she's our friend!"

Prism stomped her hoof. "No! No way are we letting that Canterlot snob join our club!"

The triplets blinked at her in confusion.

"Why not?" Cherry asked.

"Because...because...because she'll just act like she owns the place and treat us like dirt like she always does! Besides, some pony of *her* background is obviously too important to be part of our group!"

When the bell rang for recess, Prism felt some pony tap her on the shoulder. She turned and, much to her discontent, saw the white unicorn with the blue, shiny, curled mane.

"What do you want, Gem?" the pegasus groaned.

Gemstone glanced down at her hoof and watched it draw circles into the floor. "I...I heard you and the triplets started a club. The Cutie Mark Crusaders?"

Prism folded her hooves. "Yeah? What's it to you?"

The unicorn looked up at her with pleading eyes. "I...I was wondering if I could join you, since..."

She glanced back at her flank, not wanting to say it.

"Sorry," Prism grunted, turning to leave. "Invitation only."

But Gemstone caught up to her side in persistence. "Then invite me! Please?"

"Sorry. The club's strictly for Ponyville folk!"

The unicorn glared at her. "That's just racist!"

"No. Racist would be if there were no unicorns allowed. We just can't allow Canterlot snobs like you!"

Gemstone stepped in front of the pegasus. "Snobs?! I'm not a snob! I'm just...more privileged."

Prism snorted angrily. "Like I said. Snob!"

"But you have to let me in! My Auntie Sweetie Belle started this club! I'm a legacy!"

"I have no idea what that means, but you're not allowed in the club and that's final!"

The pegasus pushed the unicorn aside and stomped away. Gemstone watched her back with sadness and fury. She clenched

her hoof as the blood boiled inside her.

"Fine!" she shouted. "I don't need your stupid club! I'll make my own! That'll show you!"

"Yeah, yeah," Prism grumbled.

When Scootaloo dropped her off the next day, Prism spotted Gemstone across the playground, surrounded by colts and a few fillies. She approached the group to see what was going on.

"So you just rinse, lather and repeat three times, get the curling iron and *voilà* ! You'll have a mane as fabulous as mine!"

"Your hair is so pretty, Gemstone!" one of the colts sighed.

"Look at your hooves!" a filly exclaimed. "How'd you get them to be so shiny?"

"I polish them every day!" Gemstone declared. "And I get a hooficure every week at the spa! You should really try it. It's simply luxurious!"

"What's this all about?" Prism demanded.

Every pony turned to the pegasus. Gemstone looked down on her with disdain.

"Oh, hello, Prism," she said flatly. "Have you met my new friends? This is the Fabulosity Club!"

"The Fabu...is that even a word?!"

The Tri-Pies zipped over.

"Ooh!" Cherry uttered. "Sounds like fun!"

"Can we join?" Raspberry begged. "Can we join?"

"Sorry," Gemstone replied. "Only ponies with an IQ over twenty are allowed."

She and the foals surrounding her laughed. The triplets gazed up at the unicorn with wide, disbelieving eyes. They whimpered as tears started to form.

"Not cool, Gem!" Prism said, standing defensively in front of her friends.

"No flightless pegasi allowed either," Gemstone said, turning up her nose. "So off with you, Prism! Or should I say... *Penguin* ?!"

Her posse laughed again.

"Good one, Gem!" Kicks declared. "I knew you were cooler than those lame blank flanks!"

Prism scowled at the unicorn as she hustled the triplets away. "Come on, guys. Let's get out of here. This spot stinks."

Gemstone stopped laughing. "Excuse me?! Are you saying I smell?"

The pegasus turned back to her. "Yeah! Yeah, you smell! Smell of heel! And dirty double-crossing!"

The unicorn stood up. "Why, you..."

"Cool it, Gem," Kicks said. "They're just breathing hot air! They can't do anything! They're a bunch of losers!"

Prism sent them all a dirty look before turning back to her friends.

"She..." Blueberry uttered. "She just called us...dumb."

"Don't worry, guys," Prism assured them. "It's just Gemstone being more of a snob than usual. It's nothing we can't handle."

Blueberry yelped as she felt something nick the back of her neck. She turned around to find the source, but could not pinpoint it. That is, until she saw Kicks whistling and holding something behind his back. Prism mouthed the words "pea shooter" and Blueberry understood. Then the pegasus tilted her head towards Gemstone,

who was smiling in triumph.

Raspberry cried out as the colt behind her yanked at her hair. Cheerilee turned from the blackboard.

"Is something wrong, Raspberry?"

"I..."

She trailed off when she saw Blueberry out of the corner of her eye, shaking her head.

"No, nothing's wrong, Mrs. Cheerilee," Raspberry calmly replied.

From the back of the room, Prism sighed in disappointment.

The bell rang, but as the triplets rose from their seats, they tripped and fell face first to the floor. Their classmates laughed as they stepped over them.

"Birds of a feather," Gemstone smirked as she passed them, "flop together!"

Cheerilee knelt down to help the Tri-Pies up. They were all on the verge of crying. Prism rushed to assist the teacher.

"However did this happen?" Cheerilee asked as she examined the shoelaces tied around the triplets' hooves.

"It was..." Prism started to say.

"I guess we're just clumsy," Blueberry said.

"Yeah," the other two said, nodding their heads.

Prism looked at them in disbelief.

"But you three aren't even wearing shoes," Cheerilee observed.

"You know us," Blueberry shrugged. "We do crazy stuff for no reason whatsoever."

"Are you sure the three of you are alright?"

"Yes!" Cherry said unsurely. "We're fine!"

The teacher did not believe them, but if they were not going to come out with their problems, there was nothing she could do. So after untying their hooves, she sent them off to recess.

"Why didn't you tell her it was Gemstone and her goons?!" Prism whispered harshly.

"Mommy told us to be nice to Gemstone," Blueberry explained.

"But she's being a jerk! That's worse than a snob! You can't take this mockery! You can't..."

She trailed off when she heard the snickers behind her.

"What are you all laughing at?!" she demanded.

"Nothing," one colt admitted.

She caught his eyes wandering to her flank and turned to see a piece of paper attached to her tail. She tugged it off and saw that it was a drawing of a penguin. It was signed with the initial "G."

"That does it!" Prism cried, crumpling the paper. "This means war!"

"Why is she being so mean to us?" Cherry asked when they were all back at the clubhouse. "I thought we were friends!"

"She was never our friend!" Prism declared as she paced around the room. "And even if she was, she's certainly not our friend now! We gotta get back at her somehow!"

"But Mommy said revenge doesn't solve anything," Raspberry said.

"Unless it's on a mean-meanie-pants!" Cherry reminded her. "And Gem's been one big mean-meanie-pants!"

"It's settled then!" Prism exclaimed. "Any pony have any ideas?"

"Maybe the memory book can give us something!" Blueberry

suggested.

The blue filly opened the leather-bound book and flipped through the pages.

"Look at this!" she cried, pointing to a picture of Applebloom, Sweetie Belle (covered in gold glitter) and Scootaloo in front of a giant golden apple. "It says: *Getting revenge on Bad Seed* . And on the next page is a diagram of how they built this! It's a float of some sort, designed to go all haywire when the timer goes off, causing the driver to crash! Ingenious design!"

"That's it!" Prism announced. "That's what we'll do!"

"Build a parade float?" Cherry asked.

"Yea..." She smacked herself in the forehead. "No! We'll get Gemstone back with an elaborate, ingenious prank that is so ingenious that no pony will figure out it was us! But what sort of prank?"

"We could swing by The Party Palace," Raspberry suggested. "Daddy always has lots of material for pranks."

"Yeah, but we need to plan what we're going to do before we get the equipment."

She stood in the thinking spot and started tapping her chin. Then she gasped and leapt into the air, her head hitting the lantern, causing it to light up.

"I've got it!"

She glanced down at the target.

"This really is a good spot for thinking up ideas."

When the fillies and colts entered the classroom the next morning, the Tri-Pies and Prism were already in their seats, sitting up straight with their hooves folded on their desks.

"Hey, losers!" Kicks whispered. "What are you all smiling about?"

"What's not to smile about?" Blueberry replied.

"We should all smile!" Cherry piped.

"And be a group of happy friends!" Raspberry exclaimed.

"Like pudding!" they said in unison.

Kicks stared at them in confusion, but then shook his head and went to his seat. Gemstone smirked at Prism as she sat beside her.

"Hello, Penguin," she mocked. "How are you? Is it too warm for you today?"

Prism smirked in return. "I was about to ask you the same thing, Ice Princess."

Gemstone raised her eyebrow at this comment and was about to respond when Cheerilee entered the room.

"Class, take your seats," she said. "Pass your homework to the front of the room."

As Prism passed her paper to Kicks, she glanced at Cherry and winked. Cherry looked over to Blueberry and did the same thing, as she did with Raspberry. Raspberry nodded and glanced down at her hoof. It was attached to a string, which she tugged on. The string climbed up the wall, across the ceiling to the spot above Gemstone's seat. It opened a latch, the only thing keeping the water contained in the bucket.

The water came cascading down on the unicorn and she cried out once she felt its stinging coldness on her head. The classmates turned around to see her hair drenched and flat. She shivered as she glanced around at them.

Prism started laughing. She was joined by the Tri-Pies and soon, the rest of the class.

"Wow, Gem!" the pegasus filly guffawed. "I knew you were a snob,

but I didn't realize you were such a...drip!"

Gemstone stared at Prism and then at her mocking classmates. Even the ones she had thought her friends were laughing at her. Then she started crying, making her even wetter.

Cheerilee grabbed her coat off the rack and rushed to the filly's side.

"Children, stop it!" she commanded, wrapping the coat tightly around the filly.

The teacher glanced up at the mechanism on the ceiling. Her eyes followed the string to Raspberry's desk.

"Raspberry?"

The magenta filly stopped laughing, as did the rest of the class. She shrunk in her seat as Cheerilee walked up to her.

"Did you do this?"

Raspberry gulped as she looked up at her teacher's disappointed face.

"I...I..."

Prism could not see her friend take the fall for this, so she stood up in her seat.

"It's my fault, Mrs. Cheerilee!"

All eyes turned to her in surprise.

"It was my idea! I convinced Raspberry to go along with it! She didn't want to, I swear!"

"No," Raspberry sighed. "I...I wanted to."

Blueberry stood. "Me too! I was in on it too!"

Cherry followed her sister's example. "Me three! We were all in on it!"

Cheerilee scowled as she glanced between the bunch. "All of you, stay after class. I want a talk with your parents."

"They did *what* ?!" Pinkie Pie shouted.

Scootaloo hung her head in shame, while Sweetie Belle's eyes were still wide in shock. Since Rarity and Fancy Pants were in Canterlot on business, she was left to watch Gemstone.

"I don't understand!" the unicorn mare said, turning to her best friend. "Why would your niece do this to my niece?"

"I don't know!" Scootaloo cried. "All I know is that those two never seem to get along!"

"Humph!" Sweetie Belle huffed. "Maybe it would help if Prism was nicer to Gemstone!"

"Don't give me that! It's Gemstone who acts like she's better than every pony!"

"Enough!" Cheerilee shouted, silencing all of them. "From what I've witnessed, it seems that Prism and the triplets have recently been bullied."

" *Bullied* ?!" the three mares gasped.

"My poor little fruity pies!" Pinkie cried.

"Yesterday," Cheerilee explained, "the triplets were tripped out of their seats because their hooves were tied together, and I saw a drawing of a penguin pinned to Prism's tail at recess."

Scootaloo put her hoof to her head. "Oh, RJ..."

"What about Gemstone?" Sweetie Belle inquired.

"Well," the teacher said slowly, "my guess is that Gemstone was the one bullying them."

"What?! Not *my* Gemstone! She would never act so vulgarly! Wow. I'm sounding a lot like my sister."

"But why?" Pinkie pleaded. "Why would your niece want to pick on my sweet little cutie pies?"

"Cutie..." Scootaloo muttered. She narrowed her eyes. "I think I have an idea of what's going on here. Pinkie, go get Applebloom and tell her to meet us at the clubhouse. We'll take care of this problem. Sweetie Belle, we need to have a talk with our nieces."

The entire time, Prism, Gemstone and the Tri-Pies had been waiting outside on the steps, neither of them saying anything. When the grown-ups came out, they faced them, prepared for a long lecture. They were all glaring down at them.

"Prism," Scootaloo said sternly. "Why did you dump ice water all over Gemstone?"

The pegasus filly glanced down at her hooves. "She was being mean to me and my friends."

"Is this true, Gemstone?" Sweetie Belle asked, turning to her niece.

The unicorn filly hung her head. "Yes. But only because they wouldn't let me into their club!"

"What?" Blueberry uttered.

"We never said you weren't allowed in our club!" Raspberry proclaimed.

"Yeah!" Cherry agreed. "You didn't even ask us!"

"And Prism said you didn't want to join!"

"Um," Prism laughed nervously. "I kind of said..."

Scootaloo shook her head. "Come with us, girls."

When the group approached the clubhouse, Applebloom was standing at the entrance.

"There y'all are!" she exclaimed. "Now what's this I hear about excludin' some pony from the Cutie Mark Crusaders?"

"They wouldn't let me join!" Gemstone declared.

"Only because she's so prissy!" Prism argued.

Applebloom sighed. "Come up here. We've got somethin' to show y'all."

When they reached the top, Applebloom was holding open the rule book.

"Didn't y'all read this thing?" she inquired. "Rule 16 states that no blank flank is to be discriminated based on their species, gender or background!"

"I didn't let her in because she's a pest!" Prism proclaimed. "And I'm certainly not letting her in now after the way she treated us!"

"You didn't treat me any better!" Gemstone insisted. "You would never let me play with you!"

"Because you always made a fuss and acted like you were better than us! We don't care if you were a big shot back in Canterlot!"

Sweetie Belle scrunched her nose. "Big shot? Gemstone hated her school in Canterlot, what with all the ponies..."

"Stop!" Gemstone cried.

Prism tilted her head as she saw the tears form in the unicorn's eyes.

"What's she talking about?"

Gemstone looked up towards the pegasus and sighed.

"The truth is...no pony really liked me in Canterlot. Sure, Fancy

Pants is my father, but my mother...the country mare. They kept saying I wasn't a real Canterlot pony, and when my cutie mark didn't show up when it should have...things got worse."

She turned away to hide her tears.

"Is that why you were always such a snob to us?" Prism asked.

Scootaloo poked her in the side. "Prism!"

"No, she's right!" Gemstone exclaimed. "I...I didn't want to be ridiculed like I was back in Canterlot. Though...honestly...the four of you were the only fillies who were ever nice to me, even you, Pen...err, Prism. I wanted to be your friends. Really, I did. But I didn't know how to make friends. After how I've treated you, I doubt that will ever be possible."

Prism had never seen this side of the unicorn before. She had cried, but it was always overly dramatic and over something insignificant. The tears she shed now were sincere. It was ironic how Gemstone had always gotten on her nerves, when in truth, they were a lot alike.

"I guess I'm the one at fault here," Prism said, laying a hoof on her shoulder. "I'm the one who wasn't willing to give you a chance. I thought giving you a taste of your own medicine was the answer, but that only got me into trouble. What's worse," she glanced at the triplets, "I dragged my best friends into it. Well, no more. I'm willing to give you a second chance if you'll give me one. So what do you say? Friends?"

Gemstone turned to Prism and smiled. "Friends."

The Tri-Pies sniffed as the two embraced each other.

"Aw!" they uttered.

"But wait a minute," Prism said, looking up at Scootaloo. "The memory book said that the best way to take care of a bully is to get revenge!"

"What?" Scootaloo said, raising an eyebrow. "Where does it say

that?"

"Here!" Blueberry said, flipping through the memory book. "Right here! It shows you getting revenge on some pony named Bad Seed!"

The three mares glanced over at the photo and then laughed.

"You girls didn't look at the next page!" Applebloom said, turning the page over.

There was a clipping from *The Foal Free Press* which included a photo of the three of them covered in mud, the golden apple float sinking in the pigsty behind them. Scrawled underneath were the words: *Revenge: stupidest idea ever.*

"Revenge is never sweet," said Sweetie Belle.

"And you should know," Applebloom said, "that 'Bad Seed' was my cousin Babs and after the parade, we made up, because we found out she was bein' bullied for her blank flank back in Manehattan." She turned the page to their group shot. "Then we made her a Cutie Mark Crusader!"

"Wait a moment!" Cherry said, scratching her head. "This story sounds familiar..."

The others laughed and Prism looked to Gemstone.

"I guess we've both been acting pretty stupid, huh?"

The unicorn nodded. "Indeed. Though...I think I was much worse."

"No, I think *I* was more of an idiot."

"No, you weren't."

"Yes, I was."

"No, you weren't!"

"Yes, I was!"

Gemstone giggled. "No, you weren't!"

"I was!" Prism declared, laughing along with her.

"Well," Scootaloo said, putting her hooves around the two fillies. "I'm glad to see that you two are friends. And Prism, you must remember, if you guys are going to be Cutie Mark Crusaders, you have to live by the code." She handed her the rule book. "So study it."

The pegasus filly grunted. "Homework."

Her aunt grinned. "And I don't want to hear anything else about excluding other ponies, understand?"

The two nodded.

"Good. Now, I believe you gals are due for an initiation."

"Right!" Prism held up the rule book. "Who wants to read the pledge?"

"Ooh, ooh!" Cherry chimed. "Can I stand at the judging table?"

" *I will wear my cape with pride* ," Cherry read while standing at the podium, " *and keep the secrets of the Cutie Mark Crusaders within the walls of the clubhouse until the day I earn my cutie mark* ."

" *I will wear my cape with pride and keep the secrets of the Cutie Mark Crusaders within the walls of the clubhouse until the day I earn my cutie mark* ," Gemstone repeated with her right hoof raised.

"And I will stand on my head and do the Pony Pokey."

"And I will stand on my head and...what?"

Cherry snorted. "Just messing with you! Welcome to the Cutie Mark Crusaders!"

Blueberry and Raspberry cheered as they draped the cape over

Gemstone's shoulders.

"Now we can take the group photo!" Blueberry exclaimed.

The five fillies hurried outside to where Applebloom, Scootaloo, Sweetie Belle and Pinkie Pie were waiting with a camera.

"Say 'pickles!'" Pinkie shouted.

The Crusaders huddled together and put their hooves around each other.

"Pickles!"

The pink pony snapped the photo that would be placed in the memory book, a photo that marked the end of a rivalry and the beginning of a life-long friendship.

I tried not to make this too much like "One Bad Apple," I hope it's satisfactory.

Trial and Error

I'm going to be slow on updates for all stories for the next couple of weeks, because of exams and final semester projects.

It was a bright Saturday morning and the new Cutie Mark Crusaders were in their clubhouse, holding their first official meeting since the initiation of their newest member. The pegasus Prism stood at the podium, the earth pony triplets and the unicorn Gemstone gathered on the floor in front of her.

"Okay, Crusaders!" Prism announced. "As your leader, I get to list the first order of business..."

"Hold on a moment!" Gemstone exclaimed, raising her hoof. "Who elected *you* leader?"

The pegasus blinked. "No pony. I just thought since this whole thing was my idea..."

"Why can't *I* be leader?"

"Actually," Blueberry said, "neither of you can be leader." She held up the rule book. "Rule 5 states that a single pony cannot run the club. Power must be divided equally among all members."

"Oh," Prism uttered, her shoulders sagging. "Okay, so I won't be leader. How about I be...Spokespony instead?"

Cherry tilted her head. "What does a spokespony do?"

"You know. Speaks. Makes speeches, runs meetings..."

"Why does it have to be you?" Gemstone argued.

The pegasus smacked herself in the forehead. "Don't tell me *you* want to be Spokespony too!"

"Not particularly, but why do you get a fancy position?"

"Tell you what. We'll all get positions. That'll be our first order of business. Blueberry, does the rulebook say anything about positions?"

Blueberry did not even glance at the book to answer. "Rule 6 says that it's okay for each member to have particular responsibilities, such as Secretary and Treasurer. However, since there are five of us, we're going to need to come up with some new responsibilities."

"What's a secretary?" Raspberry asked.

"The secretary basically records everything that happens at meetings."

"Ooh! Can I do that? I can write *really* fast!"

"It's true," Cherry nodded. "She can."

"Okay," Prism said. "Raspberry will be Secretary."

"Awesome!" the magenta pony cried.

She brought out a notepad and pencil and started scribbling.

"Did you have that all along?" Gemstone inquired, raising an eyebrow.

"Yep!" Raspberry chimed, her scribbling hoof not missing a beat. "I always carry a notebook and pencil with me! Don't you?"

Prism stared at the magenta filly for a long time and then shook her head. "So who wants to be treasurer?"

"What does she do?" Cherry asked.

"The treasurer manages money," Blueberry replied, "and comes up with ways to get money."

Gemstone gasped. "Can I do that? My father has plenty of money we could use!"

"Why would we need money?" Prism inquired.

"Well," said Blueberry, "we'll need snacks and equipment for earning our cutie marks."

"Good point. Alright, Gem, you're treasurer."

While Gemstone squealed with delight, Prism glanced between the rule book and Blueberry.

"Hey, Blue," she said. "Did you memorize that entire book?"

"Uh-huh!" Blueberry nodded.

"Incredible. Hey! That could be your job! Remembering all the rules and making sure we follow them! What do they call ponies who do that?"

The five fillies tapped their chins in thought.

"I think they're called lawyers," Cherry said.

"Right!" said Prism. "Blueberry can be our, err, lawyer."

"I've got a better idea!" Blueberry declared. "How about I be Chief Law Memorizer and Enforcer?"

"Yeah!" her sisters cheered.

The other two fillies blinked at her.

"Um..." Prism uttered. "Okay. That just leaves Cherry. Let's see... What can she do?"

"Ooh!" Cherry squealed. "I can touch my nose with my tongue!"

As she demonstrated, Prism just shook her head.

"I mean what can you do to help the club?"

Cherry thought for a moment. "Ooh! I really like standing at that judging table and shouting 'Order in the court!'"

"There is a set of rules on the judiciary process in the book," Blueberry explained. "If any pony is accused of breaking the code, they have a right to a trial and we'll need a judge for that."

"That settles it then!" Prism exclaimed. "Cherry can be our judge!"

"Yes!" Cherry cheered.

"You got all that, Raspberry?"

"One second!" Raspberry cried. "How do you spell 'judiciary?'"

After Blueberry had spelt the word out for her sister, Prism announced the second order of business:

"So today, we were supposed to bring ideas on how we can earn our cutie marks. I'll go first. Obviously, because I come from an awesome family, my cutie mark should be just as awesome! Flying is not an option at the moment, since my wings aren't fully grown yet and you guys don't have wings. So I thought we could all try something awesome, like...rollerblading!"

"Cool!" the triplets chimed.

"Rollerblading?" Gemstone repeated. "But I've never been rollerblading in my life!"

"Hey," Prism said, "we all agreed we were going to try out each other's ideas, no matter what. What? You got a better idea?"

"As a matter of fact, I do! I talked with my mother and she said she could give us all some sewing tips. I thought we could all make our own dresses!"

"Wow!" the triplets said in awe.

Prism scrunched her nose in disgust. "Dressmaking? Blech! No way! There is no way I'm getting a cutie mark in something girly!"

"Hey!" Gemstone cried. "If I'm going to be running around in filthy roller skates, you can stand to make a few dresses!"

"But I hate dresses! They're so uncomfortable!"

"Well, fine. You don't have to necessarily make a dress, but I want to learn how to sew."

Prism turned to the triplets. "Tell me you guys have a better idea than hers."

"Well," Blueberry said, "we thought that since our Mom is such a great baker..."

"And we help her all the time..." Raspberry continued.

"She could teach us all how to make cupcakes!" Cherry finished, clapping her hooves.

The pegasus licked her lips. "Mmm. I like that idea!"

"Me too!" Gemstone declared. Prism raised an eyebrow at her. "What? I like cupcakes too."

"Okay then. We've got some ideas, so let's go out and get our cutie marks!"

Pinkie spat out the cupcakes Gemstone had made.

"Geez!" the pink pony cried, trying to rub the taste off her tongue. "Gem, I think you put in too much salt!"

"But I followed the recipe!" the unicorn insisted. "I forgot the song you sang, so I looked in a book. It said to put in a punch of salt."

"A *pinch* of salt, Gem!" Prism exclaimed, holding up the cookbook. "A *pinch* ! How in the world do you measure a *punch* of salt?"

Gemstone glanced at the ground. "Well...I kind of...dipped my hoof in the salt and, err...punched the batter."

The pegasus put her hoof to her forehead. "What else did you put in?"

"Well, it said put in flowers...and to add sweat and sores...I put in jaw breakers, because they make my teeth sore and..."

"Good grief!"

"Oh, as if *your* cupcakes are any better!"

Prism cringed as she glanced over at her tin of ash. "Yeah. I don't think baking's my talent."

"It burns!" Pinkie screamed as she poured water on her tongue.

"Okay, I get it!" Gemstone groaned.

"Here, Mom!" Cherry said. "Try one of our cupcakes!"

Blueberry stopped her mother's screaming by shoving a cupcake into her mouth. Pinkie chewed curiously on the baked good and then grinned widely.

She swallowed and exclaimed, "Great job, girls! These cupcakes are delicious! I guess too many cooks *doesn't* spoil the broth!"

"But we weren't making broth," Raspberry pointed out.

"It's an expression, Raspberry," Blueberry explained.

Cherry gasped. "If our cupcakes were great, does that mean...?"

They all glanced at their flanks. They waited for several moments, their faces smiling eagerly. Those smiles faded when nothing appeared.

"Oh, well," Gemstone said with a shrug. "Looks like it's off to Carousel Boutique!"

Rarity cringed as she gazed at the Tri-Pies' creation.

"Well, girls, it's very...original."

"We couldn't decide which of our designs to go for," Blueberry

explained.

"They were all so awesome!" Cherry chimed.

"So we thought it would be even more awesome if we combined them all!" Raspberry finished.

"I can see that," the fashionista muttered.

The dress was like an entire circus merged into one outfit. One sleeve was hot pink and puffy, with far too many ribbons. The other sleeve was made of red sequins. The bodice was made of blue leather, decorated with lollipops, and in the back was a grass hula skirt.

The triplets looked back at their rumps, but hung their heads when they saw they were still blank. Rarity went to look at her daughter's project. Gemstone looked apologetically at her mother as she held up her three-legged outfit.

"That's alright, darling," Rarity said, tenderly placing her hoof on her daughter's head. "The fashion business isn't for every pony. Prism, how's it going over...?"

She gasped at the sight. Prism grunted as she struggled to pull one of her feathers (still attached to her wing) out of the sewing machine. After several tugs, she looked pleadingly toward Rarity.

"Help."

"I'm not putting those on!" Gemstone declared, shrinking away from the skates. "They were on some pony else's icky hooves!"

Prism sighed and skated over to her. "Don't be a baby, Gem! It's not like they had athlete's hoof or something."

"Ew!"

Scootaloo, who had come along to teach Gemstone how to skate, put an assuring hoof on the unicorn's shoulder.

"Chill, Gem. They disinfect the skates the minute they're returned. You won't get any hoof germs."

"You promise?" Gemstone asked with trusting eyes.

"Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye."

"Well, alright."

While Scootaloo helped Gemstone put on her roller blades, the Tri-Pies whirled past Prism, nearly knocking her over.

"How in the hay do they go so fast?!" Prism exclaimed.

The triplets scooted to a halt when they came around the second time.

"You want a race, Prism?" Raspberry asked.

"It'll be fun!" Cherry chimed.

"You think I'm stupid?" Prism huffed. "I already know you three are gonna tie for first!"

Blueberry smirked. "Chicken."

The pegasus stiffened. "What did you call me?"

"Bawk, bawk, bawk!" the three taunted, flapping their elbows.

"Oh, it is so on!"

The four fillies lined up and crouched down in preparation.

"Okay!" Prism cried. "On the count of three!"

"One!" said Blueberry.

"Two!" said Raspberry.

"THREE!" Cherry squealed.

And they were off. Meanwhile, Scootaloo was guiding Gemstone

into the rink. The unicorn wobbled as she set all four skates on the floor, but the pegasus mare held her steady. She told the filly to keep her knees slightly bent and to keep her legs parallel to each other. After a few more instructions, Scootaloo gently pushed Gemstone along the wall of the rink.

"You want to try it on your own?" Scootaloo asked.

The unicorn gulped and nodded. The mare then slowly released her and Gemstone shut her eyes tight. She thought she was going to crash, but she kept going. She curiously opened one eye and then the other.

"Hey!" Gemstone exclaimed, looking back at Scootaloo. "I think I'm getting the hang of this!"

She made the mistake of lifting her front hooves and waving them about excitedly.

"Gem, stop!" Scootaloo shouted.

The unicorn cried out as her hind legs wobbled. What was worse, Prism and the triplets were coming up behind her and were going so fast they did not have time to stop.

"Gem, get out of the way!" Prism called.

But neither of them could get control of their skates. Prism shut her eyes as they collided into each other, fell to the side and crashed into Blueberry, toppling Raspberry over in a domino effect. Cherry was only just far enough for Raspberry to miss her, but when she saw the other four fillies in a pile, she squealed with delight.

"Oh boy! Pony pile!"

Prism's eyes widened in panick. "Oh, no, Cherry! Don't!"

Cherry crouched down low and sprung into the air. The others gasped and waved their hooves frantically.

"Cherry, stop!" her sisters cried.

"No, no, no, no, no!" Prism and Gemstone repeatedly yelled.

"CHERRY BOMB!"

"You *had* to do the Cherry Bomb, didn't you?" Prism grunted as she pressed the icepack to her shoulder.

"Well, how was I supposed to know it was gonna dislocate your shoulder?" Cherry said, rolling her eyes.

"You're lucky nothing was broken," Gemstone said, gently massaging her bandaged leg, "or else my father would've sued! How come you three didn't get any injuries?"

"Easy!" Blueberry piped. "Our great-great grandfather was a contortionist! So we have a bit of elasticness in our genes!"

"But Blue," Raspberry said, "we don't wear jeans."

"No more rollerblading!" Gemstone insisted. "No more dumb ideas involving extreme sports of any kind!"

"Hey!" Prism exclaimed. "It wasn't a dumb idea! You're just a terrible skater!"

"It was my first time! Give me a break!"

"Sure! How about the one in my shoulder?!"

"You know, if you had slowed down..."

"If had gotten out of the way when I told you..."

"Enough!" Scootaloo shouted, slamming her hoof on the table. "Don't go pointing hooves at each other! It was no pony's fault! These accidents happen!"

Pumpkin Cake had been standing there awkwardly the entire time. She had to cough for Scootaloo to finally notice her.

"Sorry," she said. "These kids have had a rough day."

"I know just the thing," Pumpkin Cake said, going into the kitchen.

"I guess it doesn't matter whose fault it was," Prism said with a sigh, "but we still don't have our cutie marks."

"I'm surprised the Tri-Pies haven't gotten theirs yet," Gemstone admitted. "I mean their cupcakes were spectacular and they were really fast on roller blades."

"I don't know why we don't have them either," Blueberry said, shaking her head.

"Here," Pumpkin Cake said, handing them all a milkshake (a big one with three straws for the triplets to share). "Nothing like a good ol' chocolate shake to brighten up your day."

The Tri-Pies squealed in happiness as they simultaneously sucked through their straws. Gemstone and Prism sucked through theirs half-heartedly.

"We're failures," the latter grumbled.

"To be fair," Scootaloo said, "you guys have only been at this for a day, and you can't expect to all get cutie marks in the same thing."

"Yeah, but we were hoping at least one of us could earn it today."

"Hey. It took a while for us too. Your cutie marks will appear when they appear. I mean there's nothing wrong with trying new things, but you should really think about what you're already good at."

Prism groaned. "But I'm not good at *anything* ! I can't fly, I can't bake, I can't sew, I can't skate fast..."

"Just because you're not good at those things, doesn't mean you're not good at anything. You have a talent. You all do. You just haven't realized it yet. But hey, even if you didn't get your cutie marks, you got a few laughs today."

The five fillies glanced at each other.

"She's right," Blueberry snorted. "I mean did you *see* that awful

dress we made!"

The other triplets giggled.

"And when I did that Cherry Bomb and crushed all of you?" Cherry chimed. "That was so stupid of me!"

They clutched their stomachs as their laughter increased. Even Gemstone and Prism could not resist their contagious laughter.

"You remember Pinkie Pie's face when she tried my cupcakes?!" Gemstone snickered. "And I thought it was a *punch* of salt! Really! Who's ever heard of a punch of salt?!"

"And when I got my wing caught in the sewing machine," Prism snorted, "and I was like 'Help me!' I was so pathetic!"

The fillies laughed and laughed as they relayed the embarrassing events of that day. Scootaloo chuckled along with them.

"You see?" she said. "Despite your failures, you girls had fun."

"Yeah," Prism nodded. "It was a fun day."

"Which is why you should stop obsessing about the future and enjoy the here and now."

"Right. Let's enjoy this moment, drink our milkshakes and be glad we're friends!"

They smiled in a long period of silence.

"So what crusading are we gonna do tomorrow?"

"Ooh!" Cherry squealed, raising her hoof. "Why don't we try cookies instead of cupcakes?"

"No more baking!" Gemstone insisted. "Maybe our talents are in beautifying! We could style each other's manes!"

"Boring!" Prism said, sticking out her tongue. "Skateboarding's gotta be it!"

"No! No extreme sports!"

As the five continued shooting ideas, Scootaloo shook her head with a chuckle. Some day, they would learn, but they were kids and they should have their fun together while it lasts.

Felt like writing something light and fluffy, maybe a little cheesy at the end.

Words, Words, Words

This story turned out to be more serious than the previous ones, but I think it diverts from what we expect from Cutie Mark Crusaders.

"Well," Prism said, pulling the brambles out of her tail, "skateboarding was a bust."

"I told you," Gemstone grunted as she straightened out her blue mane.

"I, for one, thought it was fun!" Blueberry exclaimed, jumping up and down. "Did you see that 360 I did?"

"How about that grind I did on the railing?" Raspberry piped.

"And my kick flip combined with my Cherry Bomb?" Cherry chimed.

"And yet you three still don't have your cutie marks," Prism grumbled.

She and Gemstone walked sadly out of the skate park while the triplets bounced beside them.

"So what do we do now?" Gemstone asked. "Go to Sugar Cube Corner?"

"As much as I hate to admit it," Prism sighed, "I'm not in the mood for sweets right now."

"Ooh!" Raspberry exclaimed. "Auntie Twilight's in town! Why don't we go visit her at the library?"

"Yeah!" Blueberry agreed. "Maybe we can get cutie marks for being librarians!"

Gemstone stopped in her tracks. "The library? With..." she shivered,

"books?"

"No way!" Prism protested. "We're not getting cutie marks in books! We're not nerds!"

"Yeah," Gemstone laughed. "Books are for...uh...what you said."

"Come on!" Raspberry begged. "You don't have to read or anything. We can just say hi to Auntie Twilight! I heard she got engaged this summer! I want to hear all the details!"

"Okay, fine," Prism grumbled. "We'll go see Aunt Twilight."

"Which way is the library again?" Gemstone asked.

"It's just over there on the left!" Blueberry exclaimed.

When they reached the end of the street, four of them turned left while Gemstone turned right.

"Hey, Gem!" Prism called. "This way!"

The unicorn turned around. "Oh, right! I mean left! I mean... Coming!"

They reached the large oak tree and knocked on the door. The purple alicorn opened it with her magic and glanced around for her visitor.

"Hello?" she called.

"Down here, Auntie Twilight!" Cherry chimed.

Twilight looked down at the fillies and smiled. "Hello, girls! Come on in!"

The triplets gazed in awe at the number of books surrounding them. Prism just yawned in boredom while Gemstone quivered in nervousness. Twilight looked the five over.

"You three have grown since last I saw you!" she declared. "How are the wings, Prism?"

Prism grunted, which was answer enough for the princess.

"And how do you like living in Ponyville so far, Gem?"

"It's fine," Gemstone said. "I have a lot of friends."

"Wow," Raspberry gasped, pointing at Twilight's horn. "Is that your engagement ring?"

The alicorn glanced up at the amethyst ring sitting on her horn. "Yes, Flash gave this to me about a month ago."

"When are you two getting married?"

"We're not sure yet. We're still in the middle of planning. So what brings you girls here?"

"We're Cutie Mark Crusaders now!" Cherry announced.

"Oh?" Twilight said. "I figured you girls would be next. Any luck so far?"

"Got a couple of bruises," Prism grumbled, "but still no cutie marks."

"We thought we could try being librarians!" Blueberry squeaked.

The alicorn's smile disappeared. "Oh?"

"Yeah!" Raspberry shouted. "And check out books and stuff!"

Twilight gasped when she saw that the magenta filly was standing on an unstable tower of books.

"Raspberry, watch out!"

The filly cried out as the tower wobbled and she lost her balance. Using her wings, Twilight caught her, but the books came crashing down on the other fillies. The alicorn gasped again.

"Are you girls alright?"

She sighed in relief as four heads poked out of the pile. Blueberry glanced up and saw an open book on her head. Curious, she lifted it

off to look at it. On the cover was a blond mare in a green dress examining a broken clock. Blueberry read the title:

" *Nancy Horseshoe and the Secret of the Old Clock* ."

Twilight grinned. "I love that series. That one's the first book."

"What's it about?" Blueberry inquired, flipping the book over to the back cover.

"It's about a teenage girl detective."

"What's a detective?"

"Some pony who solves mysteries, like missing watches or stolen money."

After reading the blurb, Blueberry was intrigued. "Can I borrow this, Auntie Twilight?"

The alicorn laughed. "Of course, you can! This is a library, after all!"

"What's this?" Raspberry said, picking up a book. " *The Frog Princess* ? I've heard of a Frog Prince, but a Frog *Princess* ?"

"Ooh!" Twilight exclaimed. "That book was one of my favorites as a filly! It's about a princess who kisses a frog, but instead of the frog turning into a prince, she turns into a frog."

"Sounds romantic!" the magenta filly squealed, holding the book to her chest. "Can I borrow this one?"

"Certainly."

"Hey!" Cherry said, diving into the pile of books. She emerged with a colorful comic. "Who are Bitsie and Vanilla?"

"They're teenage fillies who fight for the attention of a colt who can't decide between them."

The red filly opened to the first page and after reading a few lines let out a laugh. "They're funny!"

Twilight turned to the remaining two fillies. "Are there any books you girls would like to borrow?"

"Uh-uh!" Prism said, shaking her head wildly. "Reading's for nerds!"

The alicorn could not help but laugh. "Your mom said the exact same thing! Well, except she used the term 'egg-heads.' Maybe I should recommend you the same book. Has your mom ever read you *Daring-Do* ?"

"Of course, she has! She reads to us every night!"

"Well, would you like to try reading it on your own?"

The pegasus filly paused as Twilight levitated *Daring-Do and the Quest for the Sapphire Stone* out of the mess.

"Mom hasn't read that one in ages," Prism declared. "I don't remember much."

"Well, here," Twilight said as the book floated into Prism's hooves. "You can remind yourself." She turned to the unicorn. "Gemstone, would you...?"

She trailed off once she realized that Gemstone was no longer standing there. The library door was open and swinging in the breeze.

"Huh," she said. "I wonder what made her run off in such a hurry."

Gemstone panted heavily as she raced home. She had to get out of there. She could not be around those books, especially with the others talking so much about reading. She could not let them know. She did not want to risk losing her friends after just getting them back. She did not want them to make fun of her like the colts and fillies back in Canterlot. She had told her friends she was teased for her mother's background and her lack of a cutie mark, but those were only trivial matters compared to what she was really teased for.

She burst into Carousel Boutique, slammed the door behind her and

pressed her back against it. She closed her eyes and let out a breath of relief. No books. No words. She was safe.

"Gemstone!"

Her eyes opened at the sound of her mother's voice. The unicorn mare stomped angrily into the room, her magic levitating a saddle bag and a piece of paper. Gemstone gasped.

"Uh oh."

Rarity scowled at her daughter. "Care to explain *this* ?!"

She shoved the giant red 'F' in the filly's face.

"I'm sorry, Mother!" Gemstone cried. "I didn't want you to know..."

"We've talked about this, Gem!" Rarity shouted. "You promised you would do better! While spending time with friends and keeping yourself pretty are important things, your studies come first!"

"I *did* study, Mother! I've tried! I swear!"

"Well, you're obviously not trying hard enough! Oh, I hate to tell your father about this..."

"No!" Gemstone begged, grabbing her mother's legs. "Don't tell Father! He'll be ashamed of me! Please! I promise I'll do better!"

Rarity looked down at her daughter with pity. "Alright, I won't tell your father, but if this keeps up, we're going to have to hire you a tutor and you'll be studying instead of playing with your friends."

Gemstone gasped.

"I'm sorry, darling, if I seem brash, but I'm only doing this because I love you and I want you to excel in life. You don't want to spend the rest of your life shoveling manure, do you?"

"Yuck!" the filly spat. "No!"

"Then please, get your grades up."

"I will, Mummy. I promise."

"Now, don't you have a spelling test tomorrow?"

"Mmm-hmm," Gemstone nodded.

"Would it make you feel better if I helped you study?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"Excellent! Now, where's that spelling list of yours?"

Rarity opened her daughter's bag and took out a piece of paper with several words on it. She pulled up two stools and they both sat down.

"Alright," Rarity said, clearing her throat. "Spell the word tea."

Gemstone sighed with relief. "Oh, that's easy. T-E-E."

"No, silly," her mother laughed. "I meant the drink, not the golf tee."

The filly blinked. "Is there a difference?"

Rarity's smile faded. "Yes."

"Oh, um...T-E...I?"

Her mother raised her eyebrow in concern. "Uh...let's move on. Spell locomotion."

Gemstone gulped and slowly recited, "L-O-W-K-U-H-M-O-W-S-H-N?"

"Oh, dear. Well, that's a long word anyway. Here's an easy one. Apple."

"A-P-O-L?"

"Uh...buiscuit?"

"B-I-S-K-I-T?"

"Castle?"

"K-A-S-L?"

"Pressure?"

"P-R-E-S-H-E-R?"

"Sweat?"

"S-W-E-H-T?"

"Embarrassed?"

"E-M-B-E-R-E-S-D?"

"CAT! For crying out loud, spell CAT!"

"K-A-T?"

Rarity let out an exasperated groan and fainted out of her seat. Gemstone gasped and rushed to her mother's side.

"Mummy?" she cried, nudging her mother's head. "Mummy? Are you alright? I was just kidding! Really, I was just kidding!"

"Really?" Rarity mumbled, her eyes fluttering open.

"Yes! It was a joke! Funny, right?"

The mare groaned as she sat upright. "Yes, funny. Now let's be serious and actually spell the words this time."

Gemstone bit her lip. "Um...actually, Mum, I think I'll just study on my own. Bye!"

She snatched the paper out of her mother's hoof before she could respond. The filly raced up the stairs and to her room, slamming the door behind her.

"Phew!" she sighed. "That was a close one. Alright, now to," she gulped as she glanced at the words on the paper, "study."

She sat at her vanity and squinted at the list. She tried to read it, but she could have sworn the letters were moving, even jumping off the page. After a while, she screamed in frustration and flopped her head down onto the vanity.

"What's the point?" she groaned. "No matter how much I study, I'm still going to fail!"

The bell rang, dismissing the class for the day. Gemstone was devastated. She knew she had failed the spelling test. She did not know how to spell any of the words Cheerilee had said. Her mother was going to be displeased.

She was sulking out the door when the teacher called her.

"Gemstone?"

The filly flinched and turned around.

"Yes, Mrs. Cheerilee?"

"Is everything alright at home?" Cheerilee asked sincerely.

"What?" Gemstone said, blinking in surprise.

"You seem a bit off today. Are your parents arguing again?"

"No, they're as fine as ever."

"Then why are you so upset?"

"I'm not upset!"

"I understand moving into an entirely new environment can be frustrating. I can understand if you're having difficulty adjusting..."

"I'm fine! Really!"

Cheerilee did not look like she believed her. "Well...alright, but if there is something troubling you, you can always come to me."

Gemstone wanted to tell her. She had known Cheerilee even before she moved to Ponyville and she was one of the nicest ponies around. However, she did not want her teacher thinking she was stupid, nor did she want to be given special attention. She just wanted to be treated like all the other students.

"I will, Mrs. Cheerilee," she lied.

The unicorn turned back to the door and quickened her pace before her teacher could ask anything further. Gemstone was not looking forward to homework tonight, because she had to read a chapter in her History book. Her mother had allowed her to spend one hour with her friends this afternoon, but she was to come straight home and do her homework afterward.

Gemstone had lost track of time while gazing at the beautiful apple trees and arrived at the clubhouse several minutes later than her friends. She gasped when she saw that they all had a book open in front of them. It was not their History books, but the books they had found at the library yesterday. Prism was the first one to look up from hers and notice the unicorn.

"Hey, Gem!"

The triplets then looked up at her.

"You should really read this *Nancy Horseshoe* book!" Blueberry insisted. "It's so exciting and mysterious!"

"Well, this *Frog Princess* book is so silly and romantic!" said Raspberry.

"You think *that's* silly and romantic," Cherry chimed, "check out Bitsie and Vanilla here! These characters are such crack-ups!"

Gemstone looked at Prism. "I thought you said reading was for nerds."

"Yeah, well," the pegasus shrugged, "I've been wrong before. I've forgotten how exciting the first *Daring-Do* book was! I was up all night reading this! Well, until Aunt Scootaloo forced me to go to bed. I just can't put this down!"

"Why didn't you check out a book yesterday, Gem?" Blueberry inquired.

"Uh..." Gemstone uttered. "I'm too busy to read. Besides, shouldn't we be reading that chapter for History?"

Raspberry gasped. "Gosh, you're right! We should probably do that first, before we forget!"

"Why don't we all read it together?" Cherry cheerfully suggested. "We could take turns reading it aloud! It'll be fun!"

Gemstone cringed at what she had just gotten herself into. She was about to make an excuse to leave when the triplets pulled her to the floor and the five formed a circle. They brought out their History books and opened them to the chapter.

"Why don't you go first, Gemstone?" Prism suggested.

The unicorn bit her lip as she nervously glanced at the page.

" *Lanq...* " she uttered. " *aqo...im the...naqisal lanb af...Egue...Egue...* "

Her friends stared at her.

"Uh, Gem?" Prism said. "Can you read?"

"What?!" Gemstone screamed. "Of course, I can read! What do you think I am? An idiot?!" She slammed her book. "I've never been so insulted!"

"Gem, she didn't mean..." Blueberry started to say.

"If you need help..." said Raspberry.

"I don't need your help!" Gemstone cried as she stormed out of the clubhouse. "Because I'm not stupid!"

Gemstone wanted class to be over. She could not stand the

concerned, pressuring gaze Prism was giving her, nor the struggle she was having deciphering what Cheerilee had written on the chalkboard. The unicorn's eyes kept wandering to the clock on the wall, as if staring at it would make the hands move faster. For a moment, she wondered what it would look like if the hands were encrusted with rubies. It would look fabulous if it also had sapphires studded around the frame.

"Gemstone?"

She jumped as Cheerilee's voice interrupted her from her thoughts. She looked up at her teacher to see a disappointed expression on her face.

"I'm very surprised at you, Gemstone," she said. "In all my years, I have never seen a student do this badly."

Gemstone glanced down at her desk and finally noticed the paper. The big red 'F' jumped out at her like a rabbit to a carrot. For a second, it looked like a 'E,' and then back to a 'F,' but she knew the letter all too well, no matter what it looked like.

"We'll talk about this after class," Cheerilee said.

As she said those words, memories of the first grade came flooding back to the unicorn.

"Who can spell the word cat?" the teacher asked the class. "Gemstone?"

"Um..." six-year-old Gemstone uttered. "K-A-T?"

The unicorn stallion raised an eyebrow. "Is this a joke, Miss Gemstone, or are you really that stupid?"

"It's not a joke!"

"Then you must be stupid!" one of the fillies exclaimed.

The Canterlot fillies and colts roared with laughter and pointed their hooves at her.

"Gemstone's a dumb-dumb!" they chanted. "Gemstone's a dumb-dumb!"

"Gemstone? Gemstone!"

Cheerilee's voice snapped her out of her trance.

"Are you alright?"

Gemstone could no longer hold back her tears. She bawled as she raced out of the classroom. Cheerilee called after her, but the unicorn filly did not look back. She would get in trouble for this, but she did not care. She did not care about anything, not even where she was going. She just wanted to keep running.

Rarity was in the middle of sewing a skirt when the bell above the door jingled. She turned her head to see who her customer was.

"Oh, Cheerilee!" she greeted with a smile. "What brings you here, darling?"

"I've come to see how Gemstone's doing," the concerned teacher said.

"Oh, I imagine she's fine."

"You mean she's not here?"

"Well, no. Usually around this time, she's playing with her Crusader friends. If this is about her grades, I've talked to her about..."

"She left class an hour ago in quite a frenzy!"

"What? Ow!" Rarity cried out as she pricked her hoof on her needle. "You mean she skipped out on class?"

"More like stormed out, with tears in her eyes!"

"I don't understand! That's not like Gemstone. What happened?"

"I had just given her back her spelling test and then she started

crying. Then she just got up and ran out the door. I assumed she had gone home, but..."

"Spelling test? Oh, dear. Did she fail?"

"Well...I'm sure you've noticed she has been struggling in school lately..."

"It's always been this way! She never tries hard enough! Oh, what am I saying? My daughter's in hysterics and I'm criticizing her grades! I assure you, when she comes home..."

"Gem?!"

The mares turned as Prism and the Tri-Pies burst into the boutique.

"Is she okay?" Blueberry inquired.

"Is she in her room?" asked Raspberry.

"Can we see her?" Cherry begged.

"What are you talking about?" Rarity asked.

"When Gem ran out of class all worked up," Prism explained, "we thought maybe she had gone to the clubhouse or here. She wasn't at the clubhouse, so we came here. We wanted to see if she was okay!"

"Wait. If she's not with you and she's not with me..." Rarity stiffened. "Oh no. What if Gemstone's run away?! What if she's out alone on the streets?! What if she wandered into the Everfree Forest?! What if...?"

The unicorn started hyperventilating. Cheerilee put an assuring hoof on her back.

"Calm down!" she exclaimed. "We'll find her. I'm sure she just went to compose herself somewhere."

"Call the police!" Rarity shouted. "Call the Royal Guard! Call the Princesses! Call my husband! We have to find my daughter!"

Rarity's friends had all gathered together and split up to search for the lost unicorn filly. Twilight started her search in the library.

"Gemstone!" she called, digging under her piles of books.

Applejack and her family had separated the farm into sections so they could cover the entire area.

"Gemstone!"

Scootaloo and Prism searched the park.

"Gemstone!"

Thunder Dash and Lightning Dash scanned the terrain from the skies.

"Gemstone!"

Cheerilee and her daughter Apple Blossom searched the playground.

"Gemstone!"

The Tri-Pies poked their heads in the pond.

"Gemstone?" they called, their voices altered by the water.

Pinkie Pie and Red Shoes checked out all the hang-out spots, including Sugar Cube Corner. They, mostly Pinkie, spent the longest time "searching" through the desserts.

Discord, Fluttershy and Screwball searched the Everfree Forest.

"Gemstone!" Fluttershy called as she spread the bushes apart.

"Gemstone!" Screwball hollered as she pierced her head through the trunk of a tree.

"Gemstone?" said Discord as he peeked under a pebble.

Rarity and Fancy Pants called out their daughter's name in desperation as they went through all the stores in Ponyville. When they had no luck, Rarity cried into her husband's shoulder and he placed his hoof around her.

"Do not fret, my dear," he said. "We'll find her."

"Where can she be?" Rarity sobbed.

"Well," Fancy Pants said, tapping his chin, "whenever I got upset as a colt, I would run away to a special place, somewhere my parents would never think to look."

"Where?"

"What makes you think she's in the barn?" Applejack asked Fancy Pants.

"Yeah," Cinnamon Roll said. "Gemstone would never hide in such a messy place!"

"Precisely," Fancy Pants declared. "My parents would never dare to look for me in a dirty place. Of course, there were no barns in Canterlot, so I hid in the junkyard. If my Gemstone is anything like her father, she would have run to the dirtiest place in Ponyville."

"Gee, thanks," Applejack grumbled.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Rarity asked. "Let's go in!"

Fancy Pants held out his foreleg to stop her. "No, my dear. This situation must be handled delicately. I'll go talk to her."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I think I know what the problem might be, and how to help her."

He stepped away from his wife and slowly entered the barn. The place smelled of manure and pigs, and those pigs were making

noises. But there was another noise that did not belong to a pig. It was sobbing.

Fancy Pants followed the sound and looked up to see a tiny figure in the shadows of the hayloft. He climbed up the ladder and cautiously moved toward the figure. There was no mistaking the filly with the blue mane and white fur huddled in the corner with her back to him.

"Sweetheart?"

Gemstone gasped and turned her head around.

"Father?" she whimpered. "What are you doing up here?"

"I was about to ask you the same question," he said, sitting down beside her. "Your mother has half of Ponyville looking for you."

"I'm not going home!" she shouted. "Every pony thinks I'm stupid, including Mother! They don't say it aloud, but I know they think it!"

"You're not stupid, darling..."

"Yes, I am!"

"So you don't have the best grades. I didn't do so well in school for a while, and look how I..."

"I CAN'T READ, OKAY?!" she hollered as tears formed in her eyes again. "I can't! I really can't! I know I should be able to read right now, but I can't! I look at the words, and they move! I swear! They're out to get me! I can't spell either! I can't even spell CAT! I'm stupid! I'm stupid! They're all right! I'm stupid!"

She pounded the barn wall as she kept saying this and sobbed. Fancy Pants put his hoof around her and pulled her closer.

"Oh, dear, dear, dear," he whispered. "Why didn't you tell us this before?"

She sniffed. "I didn't want you to know I was stupid."

"You're not stupid, dear..."

"Yes, I am! Didn't you hear what I said?! I especially didn't want you to know, Daddy, because you're the smartest stallion in the world!"

Fancy Pants chuckled. "Actually, I had the same problem when I was your age."

Gemstone blinked. "What?"

"It's true. I had as much trouble reading and writing as you do. I thought I was an imbecile. I couldn't even tell my left from my right."

"Me too," the filly said in awe.

"I had to repeat the fourth grade because of it."

"Then how did you become so rich if you did bad in school?"

"For starters, honey, I was already rich. Well, my parents were anyway. And while I did badly in school, it wasn't my fault. I had dyslexia."

Her daughter scrunched her nose. "What's that? Is it a disease?! Do I have it too?! Are we going to die?!"

Fancy Pants laughed. "It's not a disease, dearest! It's a learning disability. Ponies who have dyslexia have trouble reading and spelling. Sometimes it's genetic, which would explain why you have it."

"You mean you can't read and write either?"

"Why do you think I have your mother read all my letters? When they found out I had dyslexia, my parents had me homeschooled by private tutors who were specialized with students with learning disabilities."

"Are you going to have me homeschooled? I don't want to be homeschooled! I want to go to school with my friends!"

"We're not going to have you homeschooled if you don't want to, sweetie."

"Then what are you going to do? I mean I still don't understand how you were the most important pony in Canterlot when you can't read."

"I kept it to myself, of course. There are other ways to succeed in life than being a good reader or writer. Why, a lot of successful ponies had dyslexia: painters, inventors...all of them working in fields that don't require a lot of reading. You can see I turned out fine, and I know you will do great things too."

Gemstone smiled. "Really?"

"Yes, but first, you must be honest with your friends and family and allow us to help you."

"You promise I won't be homeschooled or repeat a grade?"

"Of course, dearest. However, we will have to get you a tutor. I think your Auntie Twilight would be more than willing to help. And," he said with a wink, "you'll get to tell those colts and fillies back in Canterlot that you have a princess for a tutor."

New tears formed in Gemstone's eyes, but these were happy tears. She embraced her father as she felt a great sense of relief wash over her. She was not stupid. She was not abnormal. There were other ponies like her, and one of those ponies was her father.

"You're the best daddy in the world, you know that?" she said.

Fancy Pants grinned as he patted his daughter's head. "If I didn't know it before, I certainly do now."

After Fancy Pants had explained the situation to every pony, Rarity took Gemstone in her forelegs.

"Oh, my dear little Gemstone!" she wailed. "All this time, I thought you were lazy and not trying hard enough! Now I know that it wasn't your fault, I...I...I feel so guilty!"

"It's alright, Mummy," the filly said.

"But I should've known! Or at least have guessed! After all, I knew your father... Oh, Gemstone, I've been a terrible mother! Can you ever forgive me?"

"You're not a terrible mother and of course, I forgive you."

Her mother squeezed her even tighter.

Afterwards, arrangements were made. Twilight agreed to tutor Gemstone and help her with all homework involving reading and writing. The Cutie Mark Crusaders apologized for calling her out on her illiteracy and promised that they would help her as well. Cheerilee offered Gemstone extra time on her tests and assured her that she could always ask her if she was struggling with something. She would also let her do her reports orally instead of writing them down. She did one report explaining dyslexia to the class, so that they may understand that she was not stupid. Fancy Pants did his part by showing his daughter some tricks in deciphering words, like how sometimes what she thought was a 'b' was actually a 'd.'

It was because of all this help that Gemstone was able to get her grades up and her mother had her next report card framed and hung on the wall of the boutique.

The unicorn filly was happy, because she no longer felt like an idiot. She was never going to hold her problems back again, because now she knew that she could always count on her friends and family to help her get around them.

I wanted to give Gemstone a character aspect that did not make her two-dimensional. I think I came up with the idea of dyslexia after she mixed up "punch" and "pinch" in the last chapter. It would also explain why she was so nervous about making friends. Part of this was inspired by an episode of *Arthur* and I was going to end it the same way, but I decided to take a different approach. Instead the teacher explaining dyslexia to Gemstone, why not her father? I don't write much on Fancy Pants' character anyway, and after reading that dyslexia is sometimes genetic, why can't he have dyslexia too? Those who

have dyslexia vary in background and personality. If you don't think it's possible for Fancy to have dyslexia, remember this is AU.

Yes, I made a reference to the Nancy Drew books as well as the *Frog Princess* series, which I love. I could tell you what the comic Cherry picks up is based on, but I can't really use their name on this site (which is why I changed the names of the characters).

Three of a Kind

This was fun! Much lighter than the last chapter!

"Eggs?" Blueberry Pie asked.

"Check," Raspberry said, checking the item off the list.

"Toast?"

"Check."

"One glass of orange juice?"

"Check."

"One glass of pineapple juice?"

"Check."

"Muffins? Blueberry, banana nut and poppy-seed?"

"Check, check and check!"

"Don't forget the special surprise!" Cherry exclaimed, peeking under the covered dish.

Raspberry nodded. "Special surprise, check."

"Party cannons ready to go!" Blueberry declared, proudly patting their three miniature cannons. "You got the card, Cherry?"

The red filly dragged the five-foot tall card into view. "Check!"

"Ooh!" Raspberry piped. "Flowers! Let's not forget the flowers!"

"I got it!"

Cherry zipped down the stairs and returned a few seconds later with

a bouquet of freshly pulled daisies.

"You forgot a vase," Raspberry said as she took the flowers in her hoof.

"Oh! Right!"

Cherry zoomed downstairs again and came back with a vase. After placing the bouquet into the vase, the triplets gathered outside the door to their parents' bedroom. Blueberry put her hoof to her lips as she slowly opened the door. The three crept towards the couple snoring in the bed, Blueberry leading the way, Raspberry gently pushing the food cart and Cherry pushing the tiny blue, red and pink cannons.

Blueberry nodded to Raspberry, who nodded in return and rushed to the window. She pulled on the cord of the shade, rolling it upwards.

"Wh-wha...?" their father moaned as the sunlight came streaming into the room.

"SUR-PIES!" the triplets cheered. "HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!"

The girls fired their cannons simultaneously, shooting confetti in their parents' faces. Red Shoes rubbed his eyes wearily while Pinkie Pie bolted up in bed excitedly.

"Aw, girls!" she exclaimed, noticing cart of food. "You made us breakfast in bed?"

"And we made you a card!" Cherry piped as she dragged in the giant card.

The card was bright pink with a pop-up heart reading, "Happy 10th Anniversary!" The triplets opened the card to reveal a pop-up drawing of the five of them and a message on the left side saying, "To the best parents in all of Equestria!"

"Aw!" Pinkie said again. "You girls are such sweetie pies!"

"Though did it have to be so early?" Red Shoes asked tiredly as he glanced at the clock that read six a.m. "And on a Sunday too."

"We wanted you guys to have as much fun on your anniversary as possible!" Blueberry declared.

"And to do that, you have to wake up extra, extra early!" Cherry chimed, bouncing on the bed.

"After all, your anniversary is the most important day of your lives!" Raspberry insisted. "Next to your birthdays, of course. But if you guys hadn't gotten married, we wouldn't exist! So it's like...the birthday of our birthday!"

The light orange stallion with red hair shook his head with smile. "They really take after you, honey." He yawned. "Can't we do this in a couple hours though?"

He laid his head back on his pillow, only to be reawakened by a sharp blow to his shoulder.

"Get up, Sleepy Head!" Pinkie commanded. "This is no time for naps! Our girls worked hard on this! Besides, it's our anniversary! We should enjoy it, not sleep through it!"

"Okay, okay!" Red Shoes cried, sitting up. "What have you got to eat, girls?"

The Tri-Pies squealed as they rushed to the cart.

"We made you eggs," Blueberry said, "sunny-side-up, the way you like them."

"And toast," Raspberry continued, "with butter!"

"And your favorite juices! Orange for Daddy, pineapple for Mommy!"

"We got you blueberry muffins," Cherry listed, "poppy-seed muffins, banana nut muffins..."

"What's under there?" Red Shoes asked, pointing to the covered dish.

"Raspberry!" Blueberry exclaimed. "Drum roll, please!"

The magenta filly rapidly tapped her sticks on her snare drum (which seemed to have magically appeared in the room) as Cherry lifted the lid off the dish. Pinkie and Red gasped.

"You made *Baked Alaska* ?!" the latter exclaimed.

"Uh-huh!" the three nodded at once.

"Found the recipe in one of Mom's cookbooks," Blueberry explained.

"We thought it would make your super special surprise anniversary breakfast extra super special!" said Raspberry.

"Hand me a plate of that, please!" Red Shoes insisted.

"Me too!" Pinkie exclaimed. "It looks delicious!"

Cherry cut them each a piece and set the plates and the two glasses of juice on a tray. They each took a bite. After a few chews, Red smiled in satisfaction while Pinkie Pie pressed her plate against her face and scarfed the rest of the dish down her throat. Her husband could not help but laugh.

"So what are you guys gonna do for your anniversary?" Blueberry inquired.

"Tell me you're gonna give Mom a gift, Dad!" Raspberry said. "You *have* to give her a gift!"

"Relax, cutie," said Red. "Your mother and I have dinner plans at Sugar Cube Corner."

Cherry groaned. "You guys go there every year! Mommy's going to get bored if you keep taking her to the same place all the time!"

"Nuh-uh!" Pinkie piped as she licked the eggs off her face. "Sugar Cube Corner is the most romantic place in the world to us!"

"It's where we had our first date," Red explained as he put his hoof around his wife.

"I thought your first date was at Daddy's magic show," Raspberry

said.

"That's where we first met. I didn't ask her out until a few days later, a decision that would change my life forever."

He gave Pinkie a quick peck on the cheek before returning to his meal.

"This is really good, girls," he complimented. "I wouldn't be surprised if you got cutie marks in cooking."

The Tri-Pies gasped and eagerly looked at their flanks. They waited for a few seconds before hanging their heads in sadness.

"Aw, bummer!" Raspberry exclaimed.

"Don't feel bad, girls," their father said. "You still have plenty of time before..."

"Maybe we didn't try enough recipes!" Cherry screeched.

"Let's bake some pies!" Blueberry suggested.

"Which flavor?" Raspberry asked.

"All of them!"

The triplets zipped out of the room, leaving their parents flabbergasted. Pinkie Pie chuckled.

"Don't we have such wonderful children, Red?"

"Indeed," her husband agreed. "Though did they have to be triplets?"

"You're right." She grinned slyly at him. "We should have more of them!"

She slid her hoof around him, only for him to pull away in panic.

"Never mind! Three's enough!"

"How's the blueberry pie?" Raspberry asked.

Blueberry took a nibble of her pie and grinned. "Yummy! And the raspberry?"

"Yummy in my tummy!"

"How about you, Cherry?"

"See previous answer!" Cherry chimed.

"And our flanks?"

They glanced at their rumps and, much to their disappointment, found that they were still blank.

"Hey!" Cherry exclaimed. "What if our talents aren't in pie making, but pie *e ating* ?"

"Pie eating contest!" Blueberry shouted, folding her hooves behind her back. "No hooves! Go!"

They dunked their heads in their pies and started munching. In less than a minute, they simultaneously lifted their messy faces up.

"Who won?" Raspberry asked.

"I think we're tied," Blueberry said with a sigh. "Again."

"But do we have our cutie marks?" Cherry wondered.

They looked at their behinds and groaned.

"I don't get it!" Cherry exclaimed. "Why don't we have our cutie marks yet? I mean we're good at cooking, eating, throwing parties, roller skating, skateboarding..."

"Maybe that's the problem," Blueberry suggested.

"What do you mean?" asked Raspberry.

"Maybe because we have so many talents, our cutie marks can't decide on just one."

Red Shoes then entered the room and glanced around at the messy kitchen.

"Now what happened in here?"

Raspberry sighed. "We were baking pies."

"And then we tied for a pie-eating contest," Blueberry grumbled.

"And we still don't have our cutie marks," Cherry groaned.

"Oh, girls," Red chuckled. "I told you. You still have plenty of time to get your cutie marks. You'll find your special talents eventually."

"But we already have so many talents as it is!" Blueberry insisted. "You've tasted our cooking, you've seen us throw parties, you've seen us battle changelings with confetti cannons! If those aren't special talents, I don't know what is!"

"Ooh!" Pinkie Pie squeaked, bouncing into the room. "Maybe your special talent is breaking the fourth wall!"

The triplets scrunched their noses and said, "What?"

"Here, I'll show you!"

Their mother turned to an empty space. "Hey, you! Yes, you on the computer! I'm talking to you, Brony! Or Pegasister, depending on whether you're a boy or girl. That's right! I know you're reading this!"

She tapped on a wall that did not appear to be there. The Tri-Pies looked at each other in confusion.

"Mom, who are you talking to?" Raspberry asked.

"The readers!" Pinkie replied. "Our audience! The people reading every single detail of our daily lives! Can't you seem them on their little computers, reading the words describing everything we say and do?"

The triplets raised their eyebrows.

"You feeling alright, Mom?" Blueberry inquired.

Cherry moved her hoof in a circular motion beside her head. Their mother sighed sadly.

"Oh, well. I guess you three don't have the gift. Too bad."

"Daddy, what's she talking about?" Blueberry asked their father.

"Don't question it, girls," Red Shoes replied. "Now back to your cutie marks. I'm glad you're all enthusiastic about them, but what makes you think you'll get your cutie marks in the same thing?"

"Why wouldn't we?" Raspberry inquired.

"I mean we're triplets!" Cherry exclaimed. "We're exactly the same! Well, except for our colors and names. Why shouldn't we have the same talents?"

"Girls, girls, girls," their father said, shaking his head. "Just because you're triplets, doesn't mean you're exactly alike. For instance, Blueberry, you..."

Blueberry gasped as she glanced at the calendar. "It's Sunday! Our library books are due today!"

Cherry and Raspberry let out equally dramatic gasps and the three of them zoomed out of their seats. Red Shoes stared at the empty chairs and sighed.

"They never let me finish."

"Next time, you should mention frosting," Pinkie suggested. "That always keeps *my* attention!" She licked her lips and sighed dreamily. "Creamy, delicious frosting..."

Gemstone squinted at the words on the page, trying to decipher their meaning. After a while, she slammed her hoof on the desk.

"Auntie Twilight!" she called. "I can't figure out what this word is!"

Twilight put down her books for a moment and went over to the unicorn filly.

"Which one?"

"All of them!" She buried her face in her hooves. "Isn't there a spell that can just cure dyslexia?"

The alicorn shook her head. "I'm afraid not, Gem. However, I did just find a spell that is designed to help ponies with dyslexia. It temporarily translates all the words on the page into pictures, but only you will be able to see them, so you must tell me if it works. Do you want to try it?"

"Yes, please!" Gemstone begged.

Twilight glanced back at the spell book and then aimed her horn at Gemstone's History book. She shot a beam at it and the unicorn gasped as a moving image appeared above the book. She saw Princess Luna, who had just transformed into Nightmare Moon, and Princess Celestia battling for the throne.

"Oh, wow!" she marveled, leaning on the desk to watch. "Thanks, Auntie Twilight! Now I can get my homework done much quicker!"

The princess smiled. She knew that eventually, Gemstone would have to get around her inability to read, but until then, she needed another way of learning her lessons in order to pass her class.

The two of them jumped as the library door flung open and the Tri-Pies burst into the room.

"Are we late?" Blueberry asked.

Twilight chuckled. "Nope. You're right on time. Do you have your books with you?"

The triplets nodded and pulled their books out of their saddle bags.

"Did you enjoy them?" Twilight asked as she used her magic to place the books on their respective shelves.

"Uh-huh!" they nodded excitedly.

"Nancy Horseshoe is awesome!" Blueberry declared.

"I think Emma and Eadric are the cutest couple ever!" Raspberry exclaimed.

"And I can't stop laughing at Bitsie and Vanilla!" Cherry chimed.

"Then would you like to read more?" Twilight inquired.

They gasped. "There's *more* ?!"

"Of course! *The Secret of the Old Clock* and *The Frog Princess* are the first books in their series, and I have lots more issues of *Bitsie and Vanilla* . Just one second."

Twilight levitated several books off the shelves and searched through them.

"Ugh," she groaned. "Things were so much easier when Spike was here twenty-four-seven! Ah! Here we go!"

She put the other books away, laying three out in front of the triplets.

" *Nancy Horseshoe and the Hidden Staircase, Dragon's Breath* and the second issue of *Bitsie and Vanilla* . Enjoy!"

"Thanks, Auntie Twilight!" the triplets said before turning to the unicorn filly. "See you tomorrow, Gem!"

They squealed as they carried their books out of the library.

"I swear," Gemstone said, "those three might as well be one pony!"

On their way to Sugar Cube Corner, the Tri-Pies bumped into Fluttershy.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I'm sorry, girls! I didn't see you there!"

"That's okay, Auntie Fluttershy," Cherry said. "We weren't watching

where we were going."

"Auntie Fluttershy," said Blueberry, "what do you think our special talents are?"

The pegasus blinked at them. "What a question! I think you three are all talented, adorable young fillies."

Raspberry gasped. "That's it! Maybe that's our special talent! Being adorable!"

Cherry rolled her eyes. "That's silly, Raspberry!"

"Yeah," Blueberry agreed. "What would some pony's cutie mark whose talent is being adorable even look like?"

"Us, of course!" Raspberry said, putting her hooves around her sisters.

"But we already know we're adorable! If that was our talent, we would've gotten our cutie marks ages ago!"

"I wouldn't worry about your cutie marks now," Fluttershy said. "You're only eight years old. I didn't get my cutie mark until I was a few years older than you. You just need to be patient."

Blueberry tilted her head in thought. "That's right. You were patient, and you turned out great."

" *And* you're adorable!" Raspberry added.

Fluttershy beamed. "See? Your cutie marks will come in time. For now, just enjoy being young."

They kept their smiles on until the pegasus was out of sight.

"Why does every pony keep saying that?" Raspberry groaned.

"Cutie mark idea!" Cherry chimed. "Maybe our special talent is hoof racing! Last one to Sugar Cube Corner is a squished tomato!"

"You're on!" Blueberry exclaimed.

They formed a horizontal line and crouched down.

"On the count of three," Blueberry said. "One!"

"Two!" said Raspberry.

"THREE!" Cherry shouted.

The three were off like rockets. Ponies had to hold onto something as the energetic triplets whizzed by. Pumpkin Cake nearly dropped the milkshake she had been carrying as they burst into the store and skidded to a halt.

"I won!" Cherry announced.

"As if!" Raspberry snapped. "I was way faster than you!"

"No, I was!"

"No, I was!"

"Girls, stop!" Blueberry shouted. "We tied! Again!"

"But did we get our cutie marks?" Raspberry asked.

They turned their heads around, only to see the same blank flanks. Meanwhile, Pumpkin Cake had regained her balance and set the large milkshake down between the pink, spiral-eyed mare wearing propeller hat and the male changeling with blue cobweb-like hair.

"Sorry, about that," the waitress said.

"No problem," Screwball said with a shrug. "It's just the Tri-Pies being the Tri-Pies."

"So what is this?" the changeling asked.

"It's a chocolate milkshake. Sheesh, Mothball! Did you ever really get out of the hive?"

On the other side of the room, the Tri-Pies sat themselves down. Pumpkin Cake was about to take their order when she saw the sad expressions on their faces.

"Why so glum, chums?"

They simultaneously let out exasperated sighs.

"We can do a lot of things," Cherry declared.

"And we still don't have our cutie marks," said Raspberry.

"Well, what have you tried?" Pumpkin inquired.

"Baking, skateboarding..." Raspberry listed.

"Rollerblading, hoof racing..." Cherry continued.

"Break dancing, lawn mowing..." Blueberry added. "Lots of things! And we're good at them! So how come we don't have our cutie marks?"

"Wait," Pumpkin said. "Were you all expecting to get the exact same cutie marks?"

"Mmm-hmm," they nodded.

The unicorn giggled. "Oh, girls! The chances of that happening are pretty slim."

"But we're triplets!" Cherry insisted. "We're exactly the same! So we gotta have the same special talents!"

"Don't be silly. Just because you're triplets doesn't mean you're exactly the same."

"That's what Daddy said this morning!" said Raspberry.

"And he's right. Siblings are never exactly alike, not even twins or triplets. Take Pound Cake and me, for instance. He's a pegasus and I'm a unicorn. I like pumpkin cake, he likes pound cake. I prefer to wait tables, he prefers to stay in the kitchen. I played with dolls, he played with toy carts."

"That's different!" Cherry declared. "You two are boy and girl! We're all girls! And we're exactly alike!"

"It may seem that way now. You may be inseparable now, but when you grow up, your interests might change and you might take different paths."

"Nuh-uh!" they all insisted, shaking their heads.

Pumpkin Cake shrugged. "Okay then. Can I get you three anything?"

"Milkshakes!" they shouted.

"Alright. What flavors?"

"Cherry!"

"Raspberry!"

"Blueberry!"

The unicorn chuckled to herself. "Exactly the same, huh?"

As they exited Sugar Cube Corner, Raspberry looked sincerely at her sisters.

"Hey, guys," she said, "do you think Pumpkin Cake might be right about us...having different talents?"

"It can't be true," Cherry insisted.

"But what if it is? What if we *do* have different careers? What if we...drift apart?"

"That'll never happen," said Blueberry as she put a hoof around each of her sisters. "We're the Tri-Pies! Sisters for life!"

"Best friends forever!" Cherry exclaimed.

"Three of a kind!"

"Exactly the same!"

Raspberry smiled. "You're right. I don't know what I was thinking. There's no difference between us whatsoever."

The triplets hugged each other and then continued on their way home.

"Oh, I can't wait to read Nancy Horseshoe's next mystery!" Blueberry declared. "I wonder what that hidden staircase is all about? Maybe she'll find an ancient treasure or an escaped convict hiding out underneath..."

"Well, I can't wait to see what happens to Emma and Eadric!" Raspberry exclaimed while Blueberry continued to talk. "I hope they get married in this one! Ooh! What if they break the spell that was put on...?"

"I wanna see if Orange Top will finally choose between Bitsie and Vanilla!" Cherry chimed, talking over the others. "It's gotta be Bitsie, because she's a lot nicer than Vanilla..."

"Or maybe she'll uncover the stolen crown jewels or something!"

"It's called *Dragon's Breath* ! So there's gotta be dragons in it! Ooh! I hope Emma and Eadric kiss again!"

"I mean sure, Vanilla's rich, but she totally takes Orange Top for granted! Then again, she's a lot funnier than Bitsie!"

"Well, whatever happens, it's going to be so exciting!"

"It's going to be so romantic!"

"It's going to be so hilarious!"

They stopped in their tracks, confusion spread across their faces.

"What were we talking about?" Cherry wondered.

Raspberry scratched her head in thought. "I'm not sure."

"Me neither," Blueberry admitted. "Well, I don't know about you girls, but I wanna get home and read my book!"

"Me too!"

"Me three!" Cherry said, crouching down low. "Last one home is a stuffed banana!"

The other two stooped to her level.

"On the count of three," Blueberry said. "One!"

"Two!" said Raspberry.

"THREE!" Cherry shouted.

I love writing about these three! They're so adorable!

The Secret Admirer

I know it's a little early for Valentine's Day, but I didn't know if I was going to get another chance to write this in the next two weeks.

Hearts and Hooves Day was drawing near, and the fillies and foals of Mrs. Cheerilee's class were busy making their boxes for their cards.

"Now remember, kids," the teacher said, "so no pony feels left out, you must make a card for every pony in the class. At Friday's Hearts and Hooves Day Party, you can either put your cards in their respective boxes or give them personally."

"This is fun!" Raspberry exclaimed as she messily glued paper hearts to her pink box. "Hearts and Hooves Day just might be my favorite holiday!"

Blueberry smirked. "I thought that was Hearth's Warming."

"Well, Hearts and Hooves Day is my favorite holiday this month!"

In the back of the room, Gemstone was carefully pasting plastic jewels to her lilac box. She placed a green one on the front, but then frowned and put it down. She tried a pink one, but it did not quite look right. After testing several other colors, she groaned and turned to her best friend.

"Prism, do you have any red...?"

She trailed off when she saw the pegasus' box. The lid had six thick stripes drawn vertically across, each a different color of the rainbow, just like Prism's mane. On the long sides were three perfectly drawn hearts each and on the short sides, one each. A rainbow ribbon connected all the hearts together.

"Prism, that's gorgeous!" Gemstone complimented.

"Yeah," Prism said indifferently. "Too bad Mrs. Cheerilee didn't have a marker in indigo. I don't care what they say! Indigo's a color of the rainbow!"

The green pegasus colt with red hair that was sitting in front of her turned around to look at her box.

"Gee, Penguin," he smirked. "I didn't think you liked that mushy stuff."

Prism narrowed her eyes at the colt. "For your information, Kicks, I like Hearts and Hooves Day not because of the lovey-dovey stuff, but it's fun to make things for all my friends."

"What friends?"

Gemstone coughed. "Me, friends. And don't forget the Tri-Pies. Now, I may not be the best at math, but I believe that's four more friends than you have."

"Hey! I have friends!"

"Name 'em," Prism dared.

"There's Pin Cushion!"

"Uh huh," Gemstone nodded. "And?"

Kicks opened his mouth to speak, but it just remained open as his eyes wandered in thought.

"Shut up!" he finally said, turning back to his work.

His box was just a mess of glue and paper. His hearts looked more like circles, or lop-sided triangles.

"I can't believe I have to make a card for that guy," Prism grumbled to her friend.

"What's his problem, anyway?" Gemstone whispered.

"Heck if I know! He's been picking on me since kindergarten!"

"You don't have to make the card that nice. You could just give him one that says 'Happy Hearts and Hooves Day' and leave it at that. Which reminds me. Could you come to my house after school and help me with my cards? I mean I can make them all right, but the writing..."

"Hey, no problem, though you should really ask Raspberry for help. She writes the best Hearts and Hooves Day cards! She always puts a little poem in them."

Gemstone sighed. "No, that's okay. If I wanted a poem in my cards, it would be my own. I can't have some pony be my ghost writer, especially one of my best friends! I just need some pony to help me write 'Happy Hearts and Hooves Day, Love, Gemstone.'"

"I get it. Sure, I'll come by and lend you a hoof."

"Oh! But you can't write my card for you! That would ruin the surprise!"

"Then I won't. Ask your mom or something. I'll help with the rest."

The unicorn filly grinned. "Thanks, Prism. You're a real friend."

When the Tri-Pies heard Gemstone and Prism were going to work on their Hearts and Hooves cards, they asked to come too and they all decided to meet at the Cutie Mark Crusader clubhouse. Every pony brought their art supplies and got to crafting. Gemstone tried to cut a heart out of construction paper, but as she did, it kept getting smaller and smaller. She looked at Prism and saw that she had already cut three perfect hearts.

"How did you do that?" the unicorn pleaded.

The pegasus saw her friend's jagged hearts and shook her head with a smile. "It helps to fold the paper in half first. Here, I'll show you."

While Prism showed Gemstone how to make a heart, Cherry was writing in one of her cards.

"Raspberry," she called. "What rhymes with orange?"

The magenta filly rolled her eyes. "Nothing."

"Nothing! Of course! Why didn't I think of that? Thanks, Rasp!" She was about to write it down when she paused. "Hey, wait a minute!"

Prism handed a piece of red paper to Gemstone. "Now you try."

The unicorn gulped as she folded the paper in half and drew half a heart on it. Then she cut along the curved line and opened the paper.

"Hey!" she cried, holding up the heart. "I did it! Wow, Prism! I never knew you were so good at arts and crafts!"

Prism blushed. "Aw, it's nothing. When I was little, I was often bored, so Aunt Scootaloo got me some arts and crafts kits to pass the time."

The unicorn hung her head. "I wish I was as good as you."

"Gem, it's just a hobby. You're good at a lot of things, like..." Prism tapped her chin. "Um...uh..."

Gemstone crossed her forelegs. "Well?"

"You're good at...being the best friend ever!"

The unicorn grunted. "Thanks."

"And...being pretty! Seriously, I wish I can be as pretty as you!"

That made Gemstone feel a little better, but she could not believe her friend was saying this.

"Oh, but you're pretty too, Prism. Your mane is absolutely to die for! Uh...I'm not saying you should dye it. It's colorful already!"

Prism rolled her eyes. "Sure, that's why I have a lot of boyfriends."

"We're only nine, Prism, and my mother says girls get prettier as they get older. Well, until they reach forty or something. I don't know why she says that. Mother looks great! Anyway, in a few years, you'll have no trouble finding a special some pony."

The pegasus stuck out her tongue. "I told you. I only like Hearts and Hooves Day because of the artsy stuff. I don't dig all that mushy gushy love nonsense."

"What?!" Raspberry shrieked.

"Here we go," Blueberry mumbled, putting her hoof to her forehead.

The magenta filly stood up. "Love is not nonsense! It's the most powerful magic in the world! Even more powerful than friendship and fairy godmothers! Did you not see what happened during the changeling battle this summer?! Love can conquer anything!"

"Okay, okay!" Prism exclaimed. "I'm not saying love is stupid. It's just not for me." She raised her eyebrow at Blueberry. "Uh, Blue. I think you can take your head out of your hooves right now."

"Yes, but..." the blue filly bit her lip, as she tried to yank her hooves away from her forehead. "I forgot I had super glue on them." She whined. "A little help?"

On Friday morning, the foals squealed in delight as they opened their boxes. Prism gasped when she saw a little beaded bracelet with a pink and red pattern.

"What...?" she started to say.

"Surprise!" Gemstone exclaimed. "I made it myself! I made a couple for the Tri-Pies too! Do you like it?"

Prism slid the bracelet onto her hoof and then hugged her best friend. She felt so proud of her. This was the first time Gemstone had given her something she had made all by herself!

As Prism looked through her box, she came across three cards that

blew confetti in her face as soon as she opened them. She did not need to read them to know who they were from. Raspberry had written a poem, as usual:

Roses are red,

Violets are blue,

Rainbows have all the colors

And you do too!

The pegasus could not help but laugh. Raspberry must have been very tired from all the writing to have written a simple poem like this. She loved it anyway. She then found a card which was just a folded piece of red construction paper. The message inside read: *Happy Hearts and Hooves Day, Penguin. Kicks. P.S. You stink.*

She looked wearily at the colt in front of her.

"The feeling's mutual, Kicks," she said.

That should have been the last card, as that was every pony in her class, but there was one more at the bottom of the box. The heart was enormous. It was a miracle it did not get crumpled in the box. It had all the colors of the rainbow drawn across in horizontal stripes, much like her box, and was bordered with silver glitter.

She turned it over and read the message, her eyes widening with every word.

"Ooh!" Gemstone said. "That one's pretty! Who's it from?"

"It..." Prism stammered, "doesn't say."

From up front, the Tri-Pies gasped and zoomed to the back of the room.

"You have a secret admirer?!" Raspberry exclaimed. "That's so sweet!"

"What does it say?!" Cherry begged. "What does it say?!"

Prism hugged the rainbow heart to her chest, hiding the message.

"No, you don't want to hear it," she insisted. "It's...it's gushy. It's embarrassing."

"We won't laugh," Blueberry promised. "I'll read it if you don't want to."

The pegasus hesitated and glanced down at her special card. Then she sighed in defeat and handed it to the blue filly.

"Wow!" Blueberry exclaimed the minute she saw the message.

"What?" Gemstone inquired.

"It's a poem! In really fancy mouth-writing!"

"But what does it say?" Cherry asked.

Blueberry cleared her throat and read the poem:

" *Your hair is really awesome*

I like how it's the color rainbow

When I see it blow in the wind

I swear that it can glow

" *You're awesome like a helicopter*

Soaring through the sky

It always spins in circles

And yet it still can fly

" *You're awesome like a bumble bee*

It's stinger sharp and profound

It's wings are smaller than it's body

Yet it can still get off the ground

" *You're awesome like a penguin*

They can't fly at all, but swim like a pro

The point is I think you're awesome

Just thought that you should know. "

Raspberry snatched the card out of her sister's hoof and her eyes scanned the poem.

"The rhythm's off, he used the incorrect spelling of 'it's,' I don't see how a bumble bee's stinger can be profound, his similes almost make no sense and the whole thing is, well, cheesy."

The magenta filly then sighed and hugged the card to her chest. "It's so romantic!"

"This is wonderful!" Gemstone exclaimed.

"How is it wonderful?" Prism asked, raising an eyebrow.

"You have a secret admirer! See? You *are* a catch!"

The pegasus grabbed her card and tucked it under her box. "It's not a secret admirer. Some pony was just trying to be nice."

"Making you a beautiful card and writing you a cheesy, yet thoughtful poem is more than nice!" Gemstone insisted. "This colt obviously likes you!"

"How do you know it's a colt?" Cherry inquired.

They all stared at the red filly.

"What? It happens."

"This foal could be your special some pony!" Raspberry squealed. "We have to find out who he is!"

"Or she!" Cherry chimed.

"Ooh!" Blueberry said, bringing out a magnifying glass and a black bag. "Now's the time to use my Nancy Horseshoe Detective Kit!"

"Guys!" Prism shouted. "I don't want to know who this so-called secret admirer is!"

They all gasped.

"WHAT?!"

"How could you *not* want to know?" Gemstone inquired.

"Yeah!" Raspberry exclaimed. "This colt...

"Or filly!" Cherry interjected.

"Whatever! This foal likes you! If you find out who he..."

"Or she!"

"If you find out who *they* are, you could have a very special some pony! And you'll fall in love and have the best Hearts and Hooves Day ever and then you'll get married and have foals..."

"Whoa, whoa!" Prism cried. "All the guy did was make me a card. It's no big deal."

Raspberry gasped. "NO BIG DEAL?! This could be your one true love! If you don't find him, you'll lose him forever!"

"Or her!" Cherry said.

"Not interested," the pegasus declared.

"No pony says you have to marry the colt," said Gemstone. "You should find out who he is so you can at least thank him."

"Or her!" Cherry said, getting impatient.

Prism looked at her friends and then at the rainbow heart. "It *is* a nice card..."

"Please?" Blueberry begged. "I want to put my Nancy Horseshoe

Detective Kit to the test!"

The pegasus sighed. "Okay, but...don't do anything crazy until recess."

"Yay! Oh, I'm going to have to borrow your cards!"

Before Prism could say anything, Blueberry snatched the box filled with cards and raced to her desk. The pegasus filly groaned.

"I'm going to regret this, aren't I?"

When it was time for the students to go outside for recess, the Cutie Mark Crusaders gathered on the merry-go-round.

"Okay," Blueberry said, showing her friends Prism's Hearts and Hooves Day cards. "I dusted them all for hoof prints, but there are so many on all of them, I can't tell which is which! I also analyzed the writing on the card, and couldn't find a match on the others. Whoever sent you this was smart. All students' cards and gifts are accounted for, so he must have made you another card to throw you off."

"So you don't know who sent it?" Gemstone inquired.

"Nope, but I'm sure we can narrow it down with a little something Auntie Twilight calls deduction. There are seven colts in our class, and one of them sent it."

"I'm telling you!" Cherry exclaimed. "It could've been a filly!"

"But which one?" Raspberry asked.

The triplets and Gemstone glanced around the playground, while Prism just rolled her eyes.

"We can rule out Fox Trot," Blueberry declared.

She pointed to an earth colt with blond hair and a pink coat, pushing a purple filly on the swing.

"Yeah," Raspberry nodded. "He and Sweet Stuff have been going steady since the second grade, and Sweet Stuff is the real jealous type."

"What about Crest?" Gemstone asked, pointing to a white unicorn with a blue mane. "He's cute! And he has a dazzling smile!"

"Nah," Prism said, shaking her head. "His idea of a Hearts and Hooves Day gift is a mini-tube of toothpaste."

She held up said tube for emphasis.

"You could be right," Blueberry agreed. "Why not Gruffle?"

"He hates girls, remember?" Prism groaned. "He told me so himself he doesn't want anything to do with them. He thinks they have cooties."

"What about Kicks?" Raspberry suggested.

"You're kidding, right? That guy hates me!"

She looked to where the pegasus colt was standing. He was laughing with his unicorn friend, Pin Cushion, who was a brown colt with a sharp horn.

"And we can forget his little minion," Prism grumbled.

"That leaves two colts," Blueberry declared. "Dunkin and Jelly Legs."

They glanced over at the colt with golden fur and a chestnut mane shooting hoops on the basketball court. A light blue colt with a purple mane was shivering nearby.

"Ooh!" Gemstone uttered as she gazed at the athletic colt. "What a hunk!"

"Dunkin is the best athlete in the class," Raspberry said, "but he's also sweet and sensitive. I hear he also reads poetry."

"And Jelly Legs is so shy and quiet," said Blueberry. "He sounds like the kind of colt who would anonymously send a love letter."

"Really?" Prism cringed as she studied both colts. "I don't know, guys. I'm not sure they're my type."

"Come on!" Gemstone insisted. "Dunkin would be perfect for you! He's an athlete, you're an athlete...well, he's, uh, better, but that's good, right?"

"That's just it! I don't want to date a colt who's better than me at sports!"

"What about Jelly Legs?" Raspberry asked. "He may be shy, but every pony knows shy ponies are really nice!"

"But if he's too afraid to even talk to me, would it even go anywhere?"

"Just ask them!" Gemstone urged. "Go over and ask them if they sent the card!"

Prism groaned and leapt off the merry-go-round. "Forget it! I think I'd rather not know who this secret admirer is!"

She yelped as Raspberry grabbed her by the hoof.

"Come on!" the magenta pony insisted as she began dragging her friend toward the basketball court. "Let's ask them!"

"No!" Prism protested, trying to yank her hoof free. "Stop it, guys! You're going to embarrass me!"

"Yo, Dunkin!" Blueberry called.

The colt stopped himself from releasing his ball and turned to the fillies coming towards him.

"Hey, girls," he greeted with a friendly smile. "Hey, Gem. What's up?"

Gemstone was confused that he was particularly addressing her, but she politely answered.

"Oh, nothing much."

"Prism has something to ask you," Raspberry said, finally letting go of her friend.

"I do not!" Prism shouted. "Can we just forget the whole thing?"

"Oh, she's just being her usual grumpy self," Gemstone said, "but she has a great personality!"

"Huh?" Dunkin said, scratching his head. "But didn't you come here to..."

"We'll cut to the chase," Blueberry said. "Where were you between the hours of seven and thirteen last night?"

"What?"

"Just kidding! Though seriously, what were you doing last night?"

The colt blinked. "Sleeping?"

"Aha!"

"Blueberry, where exactly are you going with this?" Gemstone inquired.

"And before that, did you make a Hearts and Hooves Day card and write a love poem for Prism?"

"What?!" Dunkin laughed. "Don't be silly! No offense, Prism. You're cool and all, but I'm no good with hoof-made stuff. I buy all my cards."

"See?" Prism grumbled. "What did I tell ya?"

Blueberry tapped her chin. "Then your secret admirer is..." She darted her eyes at the light blue colt. "Jelly Legs!"

The colt shivered in fear.

"Confess!" Blueberry demanded, poking the colt in the chest. "You sent that card to Prism! Confess!"

"Hey, what are you doing?" Dunkin said, dropping his ball to rush to

Jelly Legs' side. "You're scaring the kid!"

"He's not my secret admirer, you guys!" Prism declared.

"Exactly!" Cherry chimed. "Because your secret admirer must've been a filly! And I know how to get 'em to confess!"

The red filly brought out a megaphone and skittered up the flagpole. Prism gasped in panic.

"Oh no! Please, Cherry! Don't!"

"HEY, EVERY PONY!" Cherry shouted through her megaphone.

The fillies and colts stopped playing and looked up at the red filly in confusion.

"WILL PRISM'S SECRET ADMIRER PLEASE STEP FORTH? DON'T BE SHY! EVEN IF YOU'RE A FILLY! WE WON'T JUDGE YOU!"

"Cherry, shut up!" Prism growled through her teeth.

"Ooh!" Pin Cushion taunted. "Prism's got a boyfriend!"

"Or girlfriend!" Kicks laughed. "As the case may be!"

A few other fillies and colts joined in their laughter while Prism blushed redder than her so-called friend. She was saved by Mrs. Cheerilee.

"Cherry!" she hollered. "Come down from there!"

Cherry grinned in embarrassment and slid down the pole.

"What did I say about climbing up the flagpole?" the teacher demanded.

The filly sighed. "It's not safe."

"Good. Now don't do it again."

After Cheerilee was out of hearing, Cherry turned to her pegasus

friend.

"Sorry about that, Prism, but hey, maybe your coltfriend or fillyfriend will speak up!"

"Would you guys just drop it?!" Prism screamed. "I don't care who my secret admirer is! I don't care if I never know who likes me! Maybe I like it being a secret! Ever thought of that?! So stop making idiots of yourselves, and more importantly, me, and forget all about that stupid card! Okay?!"

Her friends remained silent as Prism stormed over to the merry-go-round and picked up her Hearts and Hooves Day box before going inside.

When school was out, Gemstone chased after her pegasus friend.

"Prism, wait!" she called.

Prism turned to her in bitterness. "What?"

The unicorn hung her head. "I'm sorry we pushed you into finding your secret admirer. We...we just wanted you to be happy on Hearts and Hooves Day."

The pegasus smiled. "Thanks, but...I'm okay with not knowing who my secret admirer is."

"Why?"

"Well, what if he turns out to be a jerk? Or I don't like him very much? Or what if it was all a joke? I think it's best to keep it a mystery. Knowing that there's some pony out there who likes me enough to give me a card is all I really need."

"Oh, I see."

"You want to go to Sugar Cube Corner?"

"Oh, um..." Gemstone bit her lip. "I sort of have plans."

"What plans?"

"Well...after you stormed off, Dunkin asked if I wanted to get a milkshake with him. Apparently, he had asked me in his Hearts and Hooves Day card and wondered why he hadn't gotten an answer." She giggled. "He forgot I was dyslexic."

Prism stifled a laugh.

"You don't mind, do you?" Gemstone asked.

"No," her friend said. "Go have fun. He's a nice kid."

"And cute," the unicorn said with a blush. "And he thinks I'm pretty."

"Then what are you standing around here for? Go!"

Gemstone nodded and raced to catch up with Dunkin. Prism then decided not to go to Sugar Cube Corner, as she did not want to feel like she was intruding on her friend's date. She knew the Tri-Pies were unavailable for the rest of the afternoon, as they were helping their mother set up for her annual Hearts and Hooves Day party. Thunder Dash was out with his special some pony, Apple Blossom, and even Lightning had a date. Scootaloo was rehearsing with the band for Pinkie Pie's party, which meant Prism was on her own for the next few hours.

She chose to take a walk in the park to stretch her legs, maybe even get some flying practice in. She set her Hearts and Hooves Day box on the bench and was about to leave it to practice her flying when she had a second thought. She opened the box and took out the paper rainbow heart. As she read the poem for the fifth time, she let out a sigh.

"I guess I'll never know."

"Hey, Penguin!"

Prism groaned as she looked up to see her least favorite colt in the world walking towards her.

"What you got there?" the green pegasus asked. "Is that the mushy

gushy card from your fillyfriend?"

"Leave me alone, Kicks," Prism grumbled. "I'm not in the mood." She glanced around the park. "Where's the nearest trash can?"

"Over there. Why?"

"I need to throw something away."

Prism then took the card in her mouth and trudged over to the garbage can.

"Hey," Kicks called. "What're you doing?"

"I'm throwing this away," Prism said through her teeth. "This thing has caused me nothing but trouble!"

"Isn't that a bit extreme?" the colt said, chasing after her.

"You're right. Maybe I should tear it up first and forget about this stupid secret admirer!"

"No! Don't! I worked so hard on that!"

Prism stopped in her tracks. Her mouth fell open, allowing the card to float to the ground. She turned her head slowly towards the red-headed colt, her eyes wide in disbelief.

"What did you say?"

The colt's mouth was open, but no words came out. His face was turning from green to red. Prism glanced between him and the card.

"Oh no," she said. "There is *no* way you wrote this!"

"I didn't!" Kicks insisted, but then mumbled under his breath. "I got my sister to write it so you wouldn't recognize my writing."

She glared at him. "What was this? Some sort of joke?!"

"No! I swear! It wasn't a joke!"

"Then why? Why did you send this to me?"

"Because I..." He stopped and looked at his hoof as it made circles in the ground. The rest he said under his breath: "Think you're awesome. And...pretty."

Prism blinked in confusion. "But...but you hate me. You pick on me all the time. You call me Penguin!"

"Didn't you read the dumb thing? Penguins are awesome! They're flightless birds, but they're still cool!"

"Then why do you make fun of me all the time?"

"Because I..." he blushed again, "like you."

Prism was still confused. "Why?"

He looked up so his brown eyes could meet her green ones. "You remember when we first met?"

Prism thought back to the first day of kindergarten. The class was sitting in a circle and the teacher had asked every pony to turn to the foal next to them and introduce themselves. That was when Prism first laid eyes on the green pegasus colt with red hair and brown eyes.

"I'm Prism," she had said, holding out her hoof.

The colt had said nothing, only stared at her. After a while, he spoke:

"Your mane is weird."

Prism groaned as she shook her head back to the present.

"Yeah, I remember. You splashed me with paint later that day."

Kicks shrugged. "I wanted to see how your mane would look if it was all purple."

"Then you threw a rock at me at recess."

"I was trying to get your attention. It was just a pebble."

Her eyes narrowed. "You laughed at the fact that I didn't have my cutie mark yet!"

"I laughed because I expected a filly as awesome as you to already know her talent."

Prism shook her head. "I don't believe this. If you've liked me all this time, why didn't you tell me before?"

"Well," Kicks gulped, "you kind of hated me."

"Gee, I wonder why."

"And...we have so much fun fighting."

Prism blinked again and then thought back on all the fights she and Kicks had been in. She remembered that first day of kindergarten when he had splashed that purple paint on her. She had gotten him back with some blue. After that, things got messy, but she could not help but giggle at the memory, because Kicks had looked so ridiculous in all that paint!

Some fights had been rougher, where one of them would end up with a bruised knee or a black eye. She had once knocked one of his teeth out. As she looked back on this, she realized that instead of wailing in pain, he had grinned, showing the new hole in his mouth. He had looked so stupid.

"I guess it was kind of fun," she said with a shrug. "Remember when you slid that toad in my lunchbox?"

Kicks snickered. "Yeah! Weird, 'cuz you were the only filly who wasn't running scared!"

"I think Pin Cushion was pretty scared too!"

They both laughed so hard that they toppled onto the ground next to each other. When they turned their heads, their noses touched. Their laughter died and they both blushed.

"I, uh..." Kicks said, sitting up, "guess I got a little carried away with all the teasing. You...you know I only teased you about the card so

you wouldn't suspect it was me? That's why I made it anonymous in the first place. If you knew it was from me, you probably wouldn't like it, and I didn't want to look like a fool and..."

She put her hoof to his lips. "Chill. It was a nice card. The poem's a little cheesy, I'll admit, but...sweet."

"Thanks, but...did you really think I was a filly? 'Cuz if you like fillies, I completely understand and I really don't have a problem with..."

"I don't like fillies. Not in that way, at least."

"Oh, good."

Kicks grinned and looked down at his hooves. "Uh...I was wondering...since it is Hearts and Hooves Day and all, and...maybe...you could...um...that is...would you...be my...special some pony?"

Prism was speechless. She would have never expected the colt who had ridiculed her for years to ask her this. She was not sure how to respond. She loved the card he had made for her and with the red tint in his cheeks, he looked sort of cute.

Her heart, however, was not with her head.

"Kicks," she said with a sigh. "You're a...okay guy and all, but..."

His smile faded. "But?"

"I...I'm only nine years old. I'm not really into romance yet. I'm definitely not ready to have a coltfriend. Besides, I...don't really feel that way about you. Not yet, anyway."

Kicks hung his head in disappointment. "Oh. I get it, I guess."

They sat there in awkward silence. Prism kept glancing at the colt, feeling guilty for what she had said.

"Can I...?" he stammered, locking eyes with her again. "Can I...at least...kiss you?"

Prism's eyes widened and her stomach tied itself into a knot.

"W-what?"

"Just once?" Kicks asked with a nervous grin. "I...I promise I won't tell any pony and...as soon as it's done, we'll go back to hating each other! Okay?"

Prism was at a loss for words once again. She had never kissed a colt before, nor had she ever imagined it, especially not with Kicks. She wanted to say no, as this was a colt she had despised all her life. Then she looked at those pleading brown eyes.

Well, no pony said she had to marry the boy.

"What the heck?" she shrugged. "It *is* Hearts and Hooves Day."

"Really?" Kicks said excitedly.

"Just don't make a big deal out of it."

Kicks did not hesitate to close his eyes and pucker his lips. Prism cringed a little before glancing around to see if any pony was watching. Then she shut her eyes and leaned forward.

The kiss lasted for only a few seconds, and Prism could not believe what she felt. Her heart was not beating wildly, and her eyes were not turning into hearts like in the cartoons, but for a fleeing moment, she felt...fluttery.

When the two of them pulled away and opened their eyes, Kicks was smiling like an idiot, while Prism was trying to process what had just happened. Had she really just kissed the colt she hated more than dresses?

She finally looked him in the eye. "This never happened, okay? If you tell any pony about this, my big brother and sister will pulverize you!"

The colt's grin widened. "No problem."

Prism got up to gather her things and was about to leave when she

turned back to the colt sitting in the grass.

"I still hate you," she said.

"Yeah," Kicks nodded, still smiling. "Me too."

The Party Palace was decorated in hearts and Cupid ponies in diapers shooting arrows. The refreshments were just as mushy, with heart-shaped cookies and sandwiches. Even the punchbowl was heart-shaped. Prism would not have expected anything less.

"Too bad we never found out who your secret admirer was," Blueberry said with a sigh. "He could've been your date to this party."

"Or she!" Cherry chimed.

"Now you've lost your love forever," Raspberry said, shaking her head.

Prism shrugged. "I don't think I'm ready for love yet, let alone dating."

"Gemstone seems to be having a good time with Dunkin," Blueberry declared.

They all looked at their unicorn friend doing a little dance with the golden colt.

"You think it'll last?" Prism questioned.

"Only if it's true love!" Raspberry sighed dreamily. "That lasts forever!"

When the song was over, the four fillies watched as Gemstone whispered something to Dunkin. He looked disappointed, but he nodded in understanding. The unicorn then left the dance floor to join her friends.

"What happened with Dunkin?" Prism inquired.

"He's a nice colt," Gemstone said, "but I explained to him how I'm not allowed to have a boyfriend yet. Daddy's a little strict with colts."

"Who says he has to know?" Raspberry said with a sly grin. "You could be like Romeo and Juliet!"

The five of them laughed. Their mirth died down however when two certain colts laughed along with them.

"Hey, Penguin!" Pin Cushion taunted. "Where's your girlfriend?"

"Dude!" Kicks said, punching his minion in the side. "Lay off!"

Prism's eyes widened in surprise. Kicks then met her eyes and smirked.

"You know no filly would be interested in her. She's not pretty enough for girls!"

The two laughed as they trotted off. Gemstone's face grew hot with fury.

"Ooh!" she grunted. "What is that colt's problem?"

Prism did not take her eyes off Kicks, who turned back to look at her. He smiled and winked. Prism could not help but grin.

"You okay, Prism?" Raspberry asked.

"Huh?" the pegasus filly uttered.

"You're blushing," Gemstone noted. "You never blush!"

"Don't be silly!" Prism insisted. "I'm just hot! That's all!"

She had to get away from her friends, so she went over to the punchbowl. In doing so, she spotted Kicks across the room and found his gaze once again. The event that took place a few hours ago came flooding back and Prism could feel her cheeks turning red.

After a long while, Kicks stuck his tongue out at her, which made

Prism chuckle. She was glad to know that things between them had not changed entirely. They would go on picking at each other for Celestia knows how long, but no matter how many times he called her out, no matter how many times she threw a hoof at him, the memory of that one kiss they shared would linger.

And so goes the old saying: you only hurt the ones you love.

I recently found out an annoying boy in my first grade class had a crush on me. Of course, I was completely clueless, but it kind of drove me to write this.

Happy Hearts and Hooves Day! Even if it's early!

The Strange Case of Cheese Sandwich

Very sorry. It's been a rough couple of months.

It was reading time for the Tri-Pies, when the three of them would curl up on their beds and read their respective library books. Cherry giggled at the latest issue of *Bitsie and Vanilla* , Raspberry sighed as she read *The Wide-Awake Princess* , and Blueberry flipped through the pages of an Agatha Crusty novel.

Cherry looked up from her comic for a moment and noticed how speedily her sister was going through her book.

"Are you even reading it?"

"Yeah," Blueberry said, her eyes not leaving the pages. "It's okay. The words are still in my head. Auntie Twilight says I have photographic memory."

Raspberry's head shot up as she blinked. "Photographic what?"

"Photographic memory. It kind of works like a camera. I remember everything I see."

Cherry and Raspberry glanced at each other.

"How come *we* don't have that?" they asked together.

"I don't know," Blueberry said with a shrug.

"What are you reading, anyway?" Raspberry inquired. "Another Nancy Horseshoe book?"

"Nah. I finished the series a week ago. This is Agatha Crusty. Auntie Twilight says she's one of the greatest mystery writers ever. So far, I agree with her."

"The book good?" Cherry asked.

"Amazing! Would you believe this woman was married to her supposedly dead husband for years and didn't realize it?"

"Wow! That *is* amazing!"

"Wait," Raspberry said. "You never told us you finished the Nancy Horseshoe series. When did you even find the time? We only go to the library once a week."

"Oh, I've actually gone seven times a week," Blueberry said.

"You've gone to the library without us?"

"I finished the books so fast, I couldn't wait until the end of the week."

"But...we always go together."

"Sorry, but I just couldn't wait."

"But...but..."

"Shush! Parrot is about to nab the bad guy!"

There was a knock at the door and a cheerful stallion's voice called: "Can I come in?"

"What's the password?" Cherry teasingly asked as she bounced over to the door.

"Call the doctor, beg and plead..."

"Doctor, tell me what I need!" Cherry continued as she opened the door.

Their father, wearing a bright blue shirt, burst in and swept the little red filly in his hooves.

"Try to put a little cheese in your knees!" they finished together.

"And how are my favorite girls doing today?" the red-headed orange stallion with green eyes inquired.

"Blueberry's reading about some woman with a husband in disguise and Raspberry's mad at her for going to the library without us," Cherry explained. "Oh, and we found out Blueberry has photographic memory."

"Is that so?" Red Shoes asked, looking down at the blue filly. "Alright, Smarty Pants. What did we have for breakfast yesterday morning?"

Blueberry rolled her eyes. "Pancakes."

"What kind?"

"I had blueberry, Raspberry had raspberry, Cherry had cherry, Mom had chocolate chip and you had the same as hers but with mayonnaise on top."

"How many did we have?"

"The three of us had fifteen, Mom had fifty and you had fifty-three, but Mom thought she could eat more than you and challenged you to a pancake-eating contest and you tied for one hundred and seventy-eight when you both passed out into a pancake coma."

"Okay, come here you little smart aleck!"

Blueberry squealed as her father leapt onto the bed, squeezed her around the waist and ruffled her mane.

"You just keep getting smarter and smarter each day!" Red Shoes exclaimed. "I wonder where you get it from. Certainly not from your mom's side of the family."

"I heard that, Red!"

Before he could turn around, Pinkie Pie tackled him from behind, crushing little Blueberry beneath them both.

"I was only kidding!" Red Shoes chuckled. "Cutie, our little girl's got a gift! I wouldn't be surprised if her cutie mark was for something smarty, like curing the common cold!"

"Or if she became an alicorn princess for being so smart!"

"Um...guys?" Blueberry wheezed. "Kind of squished here!"

"Whoops!" her parents said, moving away from her.

"Speaking of cutie marks," Raspberry said, "the Crusaders agreed we were going to ask our parents and older siblings how they got their cutie marks."

"We thought it would help us figure out our special talents," Cherry added.

"Ooh!" Pinkie Pie piped, bouncing up and down. "You're going to love my cutie mark story! It's a gem!"

"We already know your story, Mom," Blueberry said. "You've told it to us eighty-six times. We want to hear Dad's!"

Red Shoes' smile fell. "What?"

"Yeah, Dad!" Cherry chimed, pointing to the picture of the glasses and red nose on his flank. "Tell us how you realized your special talent was clowning around and doing magic tricks!"

Pinkie Pie stopped bouncing and her smile disappeared too once she realized what they were asking.

"Uh..." Red Shoes uttered.

"Come on, Daddy!" Raspberry pleaded. "Tell us!"

"Tell us, tell us, tell us!" the Tri-Pies chanted, bouncing up and down.

The red-headed stallion bit his lip and rubbed the back of his neck.

"Uh...oh! I think I left something on the stove! Be right back, girls!"

He zipped out of the room and came back a second later.

"Come on, darling!" he exclaimed, taking his wife by the hoof. "You better come too! I need help with the, uh...frosting!"

As their parents vanished, the three fillies tilted their heads in confusion.

"That was weird," Raspberry said.

"Why wouldn't Dad share his cutie mark story with us?" Blueberry wondered.

"Eh," Cherry shrugged. "It's probably something really embarrassing."

"I wonder what Daddy looked like as a foal," Raspberry pondered. "I bet he was all cutesy-wootsy like us!"

"Now that I think about it," Blueberry said, tapping her chin. "I've never *seen any* pictures of Daddy when he was little."

Cherry gasped. "You don't think Daddy used to be a dork, do you?"

"You could be right. Maybe he *is* embarrassed about something."

Blueberry grinned and stood up as her curiosity kicked in. "I'll bet we can find a picture of him in the attic!"

Cherry and Raspberry blinked.

"We have an attic?" they both asked.

Blueberry chuckled as she jumped off the bed. "Come on, let's go."

She led her sisters down the hallway, stopped and pointed up to a square cut in the ceiling.

"How long has that been up there?" Raspberry wondered aloud.

"Cherry, would you do the honors?" Blueberry asked with a bow.

"Oh, yeah!" Cherry chimed, crouching to the ground. "Cherry Bomb!"

She sprang into the air, grabbed the cord to the door and opened it as she came down. A ladder slid out of the ceiling and the triplets coughed as dust filled the air.

"Come on, you guys!" Blueberry urged, climbing up the ladder. "Let's go explore!"

"Seriously," Raspberry said as she and Cherry followed. "How could we have not known this was up here?"

Once they were at the top, all three of their jaws dropped.

"Whoa!" they said in unison.

"Man, this place needs some tidying up!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"Is that the carousel from our sixth birthday?" Cherry asked, pointing to an old carousel of plastic ducks covered in cobwebs.

"And the Daring Do parade balloon from the Dash twins' cute-ceañeara?" Raspberry observed.

"So this is what happens to Mom and Dad's party stuff after it's used," Blueberry said with a nod.

Before them was a mountain of party supplies, from streamers to roller coaster cars to giant balloons.

"How are we gonna find Dad's foal pictures in here?" Cherry wondered.

"We follow the sign, of course."

Cherry and Raspberry turned to Blueberry, who was standing by a crossroads sign with arrows pointing in different directions.

"Let's see," she said, tapping her chin as she read the signs. "Amusement Park Rides, Rubber Duckies, Baking Supplies, Chocolate Lake..."

"Chocolate lake?!" Cherry and Raspberry exclaimed, licking their lips.

"Aha! Personal Stuff!" Blueberry pointed to their right. "That way!"

They followed the sign to a tower of cardboard boxes. Raspberry fell

over trying to look at the top.

"This could take a while," Cherry said.

"Well, then let's get started!" Blueberry said excitedly, jumping into the pile.

The Tri-Pies spent the next few hours searching through the boxes, stumbling upon many objects.

"Ooh, lookie!" Raspberry squeaked, holding up an orange Hawaiian shirt. "Must be Dad's. There are a whole lot of shirts in here!"

Cherry popped out of the mess with a scrapbook in her hooves. "Look at this!"

She opened the page to a picture of the three of them in diapers.

"Aw!" Raspberry said. "We were the cutest little foals ever!"

"We still are!" Cherry chimed.

"Wow!" Blueberry exclaimed, pulling out a tall, gray detective hat. "Mom told me she had this! She just didn't know where to find it!" She happily put it on her head. "What do you think?"

Raspberry and Cherry cocked their heads.

"What are you supposed to be?" Raspberry asked.

"Never mind," Blueberry sighed. "Hey, check this out!"

She pointed to a chest with a picture of a grilled cheese sandwich on the lid. Curious, Blueberry went over to it and opened the lid. She coughed as dust blew in her face.

"What's in it?" Raspberry and Cherry chimed, bouncing up to her. "What's in it?"

"Weird stuff," Blueberry replied.

She took out two rubber chickens, one in each hoof. The chicken in her right hoof had a big red "2" painted on its belly.

"Cute!" Cherry piped.

"And look!" Raspberry said, digging into the chest. "They come with little hats!"

She took out a miniature fez and a Stetson and put them on the two chickens.

"And look!" Cherry said as she pulled out a black and gray striped poncho, along with a matching Stetson. "There are a lot more hats in here, only bigger!"

"What is all this stuff?" Blueberry asked as she looked further into the trunk.

She found a photo album with the same grilled cheese sandwich on the cover. She blew the dust off and opened it up. On the first page was a picture of their mom singing onstage at one of her parties. She wore a top hat and bow tie, so did the pony playing the accordion next to her. The stallion was orange, with green eyes and poofy brown hair.

"Who's that?" Raspberry wondered aloud.

"I don't know," Blueberry said, narrowing her eyes. "But he looks familiar. I can't quite put my hoof on it..."

"Doesn't Dad play the accordion?" Cherry questioned.

"Hmm," the blue filly uttered as she tapped her chin. "Now that you mention it, he does kind of look like Dad."

"That's silly!" Raspberry snorted. "Daddy's a redhead! This dude's a brunette!"

"But...they have the same eyes...and coat...and physicality..."

Cherry turned the page. "Yeah, but they don't have the same cutie mark."

It was true. The next page showed Pinkie Pie and that same stallion standing on the same stage, beneath a banner with their Aunt

Rainbow Dash on it. They could barely make out the stallion's cutie mark, which was the same grilled cheese sandwich as on the cover. Now that Blueberry thought about it, the sandwich was divided in a way that it looked like an accordion.

"Look!" Raspberry said, tapping her hoof on the page. "There's a caption!"

" *The Super Duper Party Ponies* ," Blueberry read, " *Cheese Sandwich and Pinkie Pie, at the Birth-aversary of Rainbow Dash* . Aha! So that pony's name is Cheese Sandwich!"

"Eh," Cherry shrugged. " *I* could've guessed that."

"Look at the date here. This was taken almost twenty years ago!" Blueberry's eyes focused intently on the stallion. "I wonder why Mom never mentioned him..."

Raspberry gasped. "You don't suppose he's Mom's ex-boyfriend, do you?"

"No. Mom said Dad's the only stallion who ever caught her eye."

"Maybe he could be Dad's brother," Cherry suggested. "He looks an awful lot like him." She gasped. "We have an uncle! A real one, not an honorary one!"

"If he's our uncle," Blueberry said, "why have we never heard of him?"

They all pondered for a while and then Cherry gasped.

"What if...Mom is an axe murderer and she keeps her victims' things in the attic?!" She gasped again and looked around nervously. "What if there are other trunks of things that belonged to murdered ponies?!"

"Cherry!" Blueberry shouted. "Calm down! Mom is not an axe murderer!"

"Or is she?!"

"She isn't! You know Mom!"

"Do we?! Do we really?!"

"Cherry, if there's one thing I learned from all those detective novels is that we shouldn't jump to conclusions. Even if they are possible."

"So you agree with me?"

"No, but you may be on to something. Who's to say this pony's even alive?" Blueberry shut the book. "Let's go ask Mom."

"WHAT?!" Cherry exclaimed. "You're going to ask an axe murderer if she killed some pony?!"

"Cherry!" Raspberry hollered. "Mommy's not an axe murderer!"

"That's what she *wants* you to think!"

Blueberry shook her head as she went down the ladder. "Trust me, Cherry. I've read all about axe murderers. Mom's not one of them."

"And how exactly do you know that?" Cherry demanded as she and Raspberry followed her.

"I've turned the house upside-down. Didn't find an axe or any other murderer weapon of any kind."

"Oh," Cherry smiled. "Okay, that makes me feel better."

"Still, who is this Cheesy guy?" Raspberry asked.

"His name is Cheese Sandwich," Blueberry reminded her, "and we are about to find out."

But as they approached the living room, they heard arguing:

"Just tell them you got it at a talent show or something!" their mother yelled.

"Talent show," their father breathed. "Good one. Wait. How do you know they'll buy that? They're pretty smart, especially Blueberry."

Blueberry turned to her sisters and put her hoof to her lips. Then she carefully peered through the doorway to see her parents looking very upset.

"Look," Pinkie said calmly. "Maybe it's time for you to come out of the closet."

"I can't!" Red insisted. "My closet is locked from the outside!"

"They're your daughters, Red! They deserve to know the truth!"

"No! They'll go crazy!"

"Fine! If you won't tell them, I will!"

"No! You Pinkie Promised!"

Pinkie gritted her teeth and stomped her hoof. "Darn it!"

"And you know I can't come out of hiding while *she's* out there!"

"If she lays a hoof on you," his wife snarled as she pounded her hooves together, "she'll have to answer to me!"

"Who's she?"

Blueberry's hoof flew to her mouth once she realized she had said that out loud. Her parents turned to her with wide eyes.

Red Shoes bit his lip. "Blue, I..."

He stopped as his body started shaking all over.

"Honey, what's wrong?" Pinkie asked.

"Is your Shoesy Sense a-tingling?" Blueberry inquired as she and the others raced up to their father.

"That's a dumb name, by the way," Raspberry whispered to Cherry.

The triplets jumped as flames shot out of their father's ears. They had never seen him do that before, not even during his fire dancing routine. When the shaking and burning was over, Red let out a

gasp.

"Oh no!" he cried. "She's coming!"

"Who's coming?" Cherry asked.

"Honey, we're moving! NOW!"

He dashed out of the room, leaving his family in a daze. Pinkie turned to her daughters and smiled.

"Ooh! You found my old Sheerluck Holmes hat!"

"Err, yeah," Blueberry said, shaking out of her trance. "We found something else, too."

She opened the album and held it up for her mom to see. "Who's Cheese Sandwich?"

Pinkie Pie gasped dramatically and snatched the book. "Where did you get this?!"

"We found it in the attic," Raspberry explained.

"The attic?! I told you to stay out of the attic!"

"No, you didn't," Blueberry said.

"I didn't? Oh. Well, I'm telling you now! So stay out!"

"But Mom, who's that stallion with you?"

"None of your business! Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go calm your dad down!"

She tucked the book in her hair and marched out of the living room.

"He's not serious about moving, is he?" Cherry asked.

"Don't worry, my little angels," Pinkie grinned. "You know very well we would never move from Ponyville, unless it was the Toaster Apocalypse."

When she was gone, the siblings turned to each other with confused expressions on their faces.

"That was weird," Cherry noted. "Even for Mom and Dad."

"Very suspicious," Blueberry said, rubbing her chin. "And I'll bet it has something to do with this Cheese Sandwich guy."

"Yeah," Raspberry nodded. "Mom looked pretty upset when she saw his picture."

"Girls, I believe we need to do a little investigating. Cheese Sandwich is somehow connected to Mom and Dad's weird behavior, so I suggest we find out more about him."

"How?" Cherry asked. "Mom won't tell us anything and Daddy's got one hoof in the nuthouse."

Blueberry tapped her chin again. "I got an idea! Remember the date that was in the scrapbook?"

Cherry and Raspberry looked at each other and said, "No."

"Well, I do. That picture was taken the same year Mommy and her friends started a journal where they recorded important events in their lives. Maybe there's something about this Cheese Sandwich. Auntie Twilight keeps it in her library, so I suggest we go there and read it."

"Hold on!" Raspberry exclaimed. "You want to read Mom's diary?"

Blueberry rolled her eyes. "Aw, come on! If she shared it with five other ponies, they were sure to have read her entries at some point!"

"You want *what* ?" Twilight asked, her eyes blinking in confusion.

"We want that old diary of yours," Blueberry repeated. "We want to see what Mom wrote in there."

"Well, that's pretty private and you should respect..."

"But Mom's hiding something from us!" Raspberry insisted.

"Yeah!" Cherry confirmed. "We found this scrapbook with a guy named Cheese Sandwich in it, but when we showed it to Mom, she freaked out!"

"Oh," Twilight said with a grin. "Is that all? Well, I believe Pinkie wrote something about Cheese Sandwich's visit."

"Do you know who he is, Auntie Twilight?" Blueberry inquired.

"Yes. He was a party planner, like your mom, except he was a traveling one. He came into Ponyville one day to throw Rainbow Dash's birthday party, and that got Pinkie jealous, even challenged him to a Goof-Off. However, they compromised and threw the party together."

Raspberry tilted her head. "Why does that story sound familiar?"

"I think I know," Blueberry said. "It sounds a bit like how Mom and Dad met, except it wasn't Aunt Rainbow's birthday, but the Cake twins'. Dad was the entertainment and Mom got jealous. She then challenged him to a Goof-Off, but they called a truce because all Dad wanted to do was prove he was goofy enough for her. Then he asked her out on a date and the rest is history."

"Oh yeah," Raspberry said with a sigh. "The most romantic story ever!"

Twilight scrunched her nose. " *That's* what your parents told you?"

"Yeah," the Tri-Pies nodded.

"That's strange. As I recall, Pinkie was never jealous of Red. They seemed to hit it off really well. In fact, Pinkie was the one who hired Red for the party after seeing him at his magic show."

"Really?" Blueberry said, scratching her head. "Well, she did say she saw him at the magic show first. She didn't say she hired him."

Twilight narrowed her eyes. "Is that Pinkie Pie's old Sheerluck hat?"

"Uh-huh, but that's not important right now. Are you sure you got the story right?"

"Of course. I was there when Pinkie Pie hired him. A few days later, the two of them were inseparable. I always found it so strange how they got together so fast, as if they had known each other for years."

The alicorn finished her search of the shelves and pulled out a purple book with a jeweled cover. She levitated it into Blueberry's hooves.

"I'd prefer it if you read it here," Twilight said. "I don't want that book damaged."

She went upstairs to give the fillies some privacy.

"Okay," Blueberry said, opening the book. "Let's find Mom's entries." She began turning the pages without seeming to read them. "No, no, no, no, aha! Found it!"

"What does it say?" Cherry demanded.

" *Dear Diary,*

Today I met the most super duper awesome pony ever! His name is Cheese Sandwich and he's a super duper party pony, like me! He came into Ponyville, because his Cheesy Sense (like my Pinkie Sense!) was telling him there was a party! Rainbow Dash's Birth-aversary, to be exact! In fact, I'm at that party right now, which we threw together!

Maybe I should start at the beginning. He came into town, blew every pony away with his awesomeness, was asked to throw Rainbow Dash's party instead of me, and I got very sad. So I challenged him to a Goof-Off to prove that I was a the better party pony! And I'd have to say, he plays a mean accordion! I swear, the thing tried to bite me!

But things got out of hoof and I realized Rainbow Dash wasn't having fun on her special day. So I forfeited and packed up my party

supplies. Then my friends came to apologize, so did Cheese! Turns out I was the one who inspired him to become a super duper party thrower! And then we agreed to throw Dashie's party together!

Anyway, I let my pride get in the way of letting my friend enjoy her special day. Cheese is a really great party pony! I should've been a big enough pony to admit that. After all, he is kind of cute...

Sorry, I had to go away for a while. Cheese was leaving and he gave me his special rubber chicken friend Boneless as a memento! Don't worry, he has another one to keep him company.

I'm sure gonna miss him. Cheese, I mean. We make a pretty good team! Imagine if we started a party business together! I hope he comes back someday.

The (Not) One and Only Party Pony,

Pinkie Pie ."

"That explains the rubber chickens," Cherry chimed.

Blueberry flipped through the journal some more.

"Wow," she uttered when she stopped at a page.

"What?" Raspberry and Cherry asked, leaning in to get a look.

The page was covered in pink glitter pen, with words like *Pinkie + Cheese* , *P.P. loves C.S., Mrs. Pinkie Sandwich, Mrs. Pinkamena Diane Sandwich, Cheese Pie, Pink Sandwich.* In the bottom right-hoof corner in pencil was *Pinkie, stop doodling all over the diary. R.D.*

"Wow!" Raspberry exclaimed. "Looks like Mom had a little crush on this guy."

"But," Blueberry uttered, "she couldn't have. She said the only pony she ever loved was Dad."

"Nuh-uh!" Cherry insisted. "She told us she once had a crush on Aunt Rainbow, remember?"

Raspberry tilted her head. "I thought she was kidding about that."

"Hey! It happens!"

Blueberry turned to the next page. "I'm thinking it was a little more than a crush."

There was a list of names: *Club Sandwich, Ranch Sandwich, Daisy Sandwich, Peanut Butter Sandwich, Jelly Sandwich, Finger Sandwich, Cucumber Sandwich, Apple Pie, Maud Pie, Inkie, Blinkie, Clyde, Sue, Boysenberry Pie, Strawberry Pie, Cheese Pie* ...

"Hey!" Raspberry exclaimed, pointing to three names in a circle. "It's our names!"

"Was Mom psychic or something?" Cherry marveled.

"Don't be silly! She was just picking foal names!"

"She wanted to have kids with this Cheese Sandwich guy?" Blueberry questioned.

"She picked our names before she and Dad married?" Cherry chimed.

Blueberry slammed the book angrily. "I can't believe there was a guy before Dad! No wonder Mom freaked out when she saw him! Does Dad even know about Cheese Sandwich?!"

Twilight came downstairs once she heard shouting. "Is everything alright down there?"

"Auntie Twilight," Blueberry said, walking up to her, "did you know Mom liked some pony before Dad?"

"I knew about her crush on Cheese Sandwich, if that's what you mean."

"Why didn't you tell us?!"

"I didn't think it was that important. Sweetie, not every pony marries their first love. Your mom knew Cheese Sandwich long before she

met your dad."

"Did Cheese Sandwich ever come back to Ponyville?" Raspberry inquired.

"Err, no. I mean he and Pinkie Pie used to write letters to each other, but Rainbow Dash's party was the last either of us saw of him."

"Letters?" Blueberry uttered, her head shooting up. "Hey! There was a pile of envelopes in that trunk with Cheese's stuff! I'll bet those are the letters you're talking about!"

"Trunk?" Twilight asked, blinking. "Pinkie has a trunk of Cheese Sandwich's stuff?"

"Come on! Let's go read them!"

"But Mom said we're not allowed in the attic," Raspberry reminded them.

"Who cares? Maybe those letters can give us another clue!"

"What other clue?" Cherry asked. "Isn't this mystery pretty much solved?"

"Of course not! We still don't know why Mom was nervous about us finding Cheese Sandwich's stuff and we don't know why it's all up there!"

"Maybe he sent her that stuff," Raspberry said. "Ponies in long-distance relationships often send each other things in the mail."

"And I would be nervous if my foals found out I had an ex-boyfriend," Cherry added.

Blueberry shook her head. "No! There's more to this! I can feel it in my gut!"

"Blueberry!" Raspberry exclaimed putting her hoof on her sister's shoulder. "Calm down! Auntie Twilight's right. We shouldn't have poked into Mom's private stuff."

"Yeah," Cherry agreed. "I mean...this Cheese guy is a thing of the past. And it's nothing bad, anyway. So Mom had an ex-boyfriend. Big deal. It's not really our business."

"But..." Blueberry stammered. "Don't you guys want to find out more? Don't you want to know the whole story?"

Cherry and Raspberry looked at each other and sighed.

"You're on your own, Blue," the latter said.

Blueberry watched in disbelief as her sisters exited the library. Twilight put a hoof on the blue filly's shoulder.

"I know you wanna be like the detectives in your books," the alicorn said softly, "and uncover the mysteries of life, but there are some mysteries that are better unsolved."

"But..."

"Besides, this little thing about your mom's past doesn't affect you now. Your mom's married to your dad now. Does it really matter if she dated other stallions before?"

Blueberry sighed. "I guess not."

"Good. Now why don't you go home and give your parents a hug?"

Blueberry said nothing, only hung her head and nodded.

As she walked down the streets, she could not shake the feeling that there was more to this mystery than meets the eye. But if her sisters didn't believe her, what could she do?

"Excuse me?"

Blueberry looked up to see a white pegasus with blonde hair and purple eyes.

"Yeah?" the filly said in response.

"Hi," the mare said with a wave. "I'm new in town. I'm looking for an

old friend. Maybe you've seen him?"

"I guess. What does he look like?"

"Oh, tall, orange, brunette, green eyes, really wacky, answers to the name of Cheese Sandwich?"

Blueberry's eyes widened. "Cheese Sandwich?"

"Ah, so you *do* know him!"

"Well, I've heard of him, but I've never met him. He hasn't been in Ponyville for almost twenty years."

The pegasus narrowed her purple eyes and glanced around. "I got a tip from a cranky old donkey! He's around here somewhere! I've got a score to settle with him, and when I find him, he's gonna get it!"

She spread her wings and took to the skies. She came back a second later and took off Blueberry's hat.

"Huh," she muttered.

"What?"

"Just checking something."

She put her hat down and flew off again.

"That was weird," Blueberry said.

She also found it a strange coincidence that some pony else wanted information on this Cheese Sandwich.

Blueberry was walking down the hallway, perplexed on her meeting with the strange pegasus mare. She wished she had caught her name, or at least gotten more answers out of her. Every time she heard about this Cheese Sandwich, things got weirder. Why was this mare looking for him and why was she searching for him in Ponyville?

She paused as she heard hyperventilating coming from her parents' room. Her curiosity was peaked once again and she put her ear to the door to listen.

"Breathe into the bag, baby!" she heard her mother say. "In and out, in and out."

"This isn't helping!" her father shouted. "What's the point of breathing?! When she finds me, I won't have to worry about breathing!"

"Red! Calm down! She won't find you! And even if she does, I'll tell her to back off! After all, you're mine now!"

"You don't know her, honey! She's crazy!"

Pinkie gasped. "Crazier than me?!"

"No, you're good crazy. She's the *bad* crazy! And if she finds out I'm married, she'll get even madder! We have to leave Ponyville, NOW!"

"We're not leaving Ponyville!"

"But..." he heaved, "she'll...find..."

"Hold on. I'll get you another paper bag."

Blueberry gasped as she heard hoofsteps coming toward the door. She ran to her room before her mother could catch her.

As she collapsed on her bed, she struggled to catch her breath, but she smiled too. This mystery wasn't over. Her parents were hiding something, something about a mare. And she was going to investigate it tonight.

Blueberry glanced around the dark bedroom. The clock read midnight and her sisters were fast asleep. She opened the drawer of her bedside table and took out a flashlight. She turned it on, climbed out of bed and tiptoed out the room.

She tried being oh so careful not to make the floor creak as she crept down the hallway. She stopped beneath the attic door and realized a flaw in her plan. How was she going to bring down the ladder without making any noise? She had also never jumped that high before. No, only Cherry could do that and she couldn't wake her.

Blueberry returned a short time later with a step-ladder. She stood on her hind legs, but still could not reach the door. She wobbled and would have fallen over has she not set her front hooves down and balanced herself.

She then had another idea and took the step-ladder away. She came back with a trampoline. Her warning from her mother echoed through her head:

Don't bounce too high or you'll hit the ceiling and crack your pretty little skull!

Blueberry nodded, as if her mother could see her. Their mother had always taught them to take risks, but think safe. Blueberry started with a light jump and the more force she put into her legs, the higher she went. She kept reaching for the cord to the door until she was high enough to grab it and pull it down.

But it wouldn't come down. It was locked. Blueberry gritted her teeth as she leapt off the trampoline and landed on the floor. She had a lock pick in her Nancy Horseshoe Detective Kit, but she couldn't pick the lock while bouncing up and down.

She put away the trampoline and came back with not just the lock pick, but four suction cups. She placed the lock pick in her mouth and strapped the suction cups to her hooves. She used them to climb the wall, hoping the sound of them sticking and unsticking wasn't loud enough to wake her family.

She then moved from the wall to the ceiling and finally made it to the attic door. It was hard to reach the lock with her mouth, so she used her hair to hold the piece of metal and stick it in the lock. After jiggling it around, she heard a click and smiled in satisfaction.

She let the lock pick fall to the floor, making a little *ting!* as it hit. Since her hooves were busy, Blueberry also used her hair to pull on the cord and the ladder fell out with a loud *bang!* The filly cringed, but she did not hear any pony waking up, so she crawled through the square hole.

She shook off her suction cups and went over to where they had found the trunk, but it wasn't there. Pinkie Pie must have moved it.

"Great," Blueberry grunted, glancing around the junkyard that was their attic. "It'll take forever to find it again!"

She hung her head, disappointed that she had gone through all this trouble for nothing.

"Hello?"

Blueberry's head shot up when she heard her mother's voice.

"Who's up there?"

The filly searched frantically around the attic for a hiding place. She chose to hide behind a carousel duck. She stiffened when she saw a light.

"Red, is that you?" Pinkie called. "Girls? Girls, I told you you're not allowed up here! How'd you even get the door open, anyway?"

Blueberry pressed her back against the carousel duck as her mother walked by.

"If you're a burglar, you don't scare me! Or a zombie pony! I'm gonna find you no matter what you are! I'll bet you're hiding in the chocolate lake! It's always the chocolate lake!"

The filly gulped and waited until her mother's hoofsteps were faint. She peered over the duck and glanced around. Pinkie must have gone further into the attic. For once, Blueberry was glad the place was so cluttered.

She took her chance and headed for the door. She did not bother closing it, since her mother would do it once she came down. She

was about to rush to her room when she noticed the light in the bathroom down the hall was on and the door slightly ajar. Blueberry cursed her curiosity as she crept over to it.

She pushed the door open a crack and saw her dad standing in front of the mirror. He was squirting something on his hair, looking very anxious. Blueberry looked away before he could notice her, but she remembered the label on the bottle: *Hair Dye.*

Her dad dyed his hair? All this time?

These were the thoughts that ran through her head as she skittered back to her room. She crawled back in bed, closed her eyes and summoned her photographic memory. She recalled the picture of Cheese Sandwich and then thought of her dad. Then she looked at both images and compared them.

She had been right. They *did* look a lot alike. Same height, same built, same coat, same eye color. The only difference was the hair.

"Hair dye..." Blueberry muttered. She sat up in bed. "Hair dye!"

"Huh?" Raspberry grumbled.

Blueberry blushed. "Sorry, sis. Weird dream. Go back to sleep."

Raspberry only moaned in response.

The next morning, the Pie family's living room was crowded with ponies. Not just the Pies, but four of Pinkie's best friends (Rainbow Dash was still away with the Wonderbolts), Prism and Gemstone.

"Any pony know what the hay we're doin' here?" Applejack asked.

"I don't know," Prism shrugged. "Blueberry just told us to come here at eleven."

"Don't look at us," Cherry said.

"We have no idea what this is about either," Raspberry explained.

"I hope we get whatever this is over with," Rarity said, touching her stomach. "I have a doctor's appointment at noon. We need to check on how the little one is doing."

"Oh, I'm sure Blueberry just has a special surprise for us," Pinkie beamed. "Maybe a party!"

"Without us helping?" Raspberry asked, pointing to herself and Cherry. "I don't think so."

"Ahem."

They all turned to the pony that had cleared her throat, that pony being Blueberry. She was leaning against the doorway, the gray detective hat on her head, blowing into a bubble pipe.

"Ooh!" Pinkie squealed. "You found my old pipe too!"

Blueberry nodded coolly and took the pipe out of her mouth.

"I'll bet you're all wondering what you're doing here."

"Oh boy," Twilight said, rolling her eyes. "Like mother, like daughter."

"Technically," Pinkie whispered, " *you* were the one who said that."

"I called you here," Blueberry said as she walked within the circle of ponies, "to tell you all of a mystery so strange, peculiar and, of course, mysterious."

"I think she's finally cracked," Prism whispered to Gemstone.

"I heard that, missy! Anyway, yesterday afternoon, my sisters and I stumbled upon a mysterious trunk in the attic."

Pinkie Pie suddenly grew very nervous.

"In that trunk, we found, among many things, a photo album of this stallion named Cheese Sandwich."

Red Shoes gasped. "Um, Blue...?"

"Let me finish, Dad!" Blueberry narrowed her eyes. "If that is indeed your real name!"

He crossed his hooves. "Oh, I'm your father alright! Use whatever DNA test you've got on me!"

"I don't have to, because I already know you're not who you say you are."

Beads of sweat dripped down his forehead.

"Uh, sweetie..." Pinkie started to say.

"Back to this Cheese Sandwich!" Blueberry exclaimed. "We showed his picture to Mom, and she freaked out. We wanted to know why, so we read her old journal..."

"YOU READ OUR DIARY?!" her mother shrieked.

"Seems that Mom was very attached to this Cheese Sandwich, and that the story of how they met was somewhat similar to how she and Dad met." Blueberry looked accusingly at her parents. "But Auntie Twilight told us that the details of *you* meeting were twisted!"

Pinkie glared at the alicorn.

"Well, how was *I* to know?" Twilight shrugged.

"And," Blueberry continued, "I realized that not only were the stories of Cheese Sandwich and Dad similar, but their appearances were too!" She hopped onto Red Shoes' back. "You grown-ups have all met Cheese Sandwich. Haven't you noticed that he and Dad have the exact same coat, the exact same legs, the exact same bone structure, and the exact same eyes?"

"What are you sayin'?" Applejack asked.

Blueberry hopped off her father and then pointed at his face. "I'm saying that my dad *is* Cheese Sandwich!"

Every pony gasped, including Red Shoes. He tried to throw suspicion off him with a fake smile.

"What?!" he laughed. "Little filly, you've been reading too many of those detective stories! You know who I really am!"

"I do," Blueberry said. "And before you make any more denials, I'll have you know that I found *this* in the bathroom!" She lifted her hat and brought out a big red bottle. "Red hair dye!"

Every pony gasped again.

"Blueberry, stop!" Pinkie exclaimed, grabbing the bottle. "Your dad just...uses this to get rid of gray!"

"But he's *not* graying!" Blueberry insisted. She hopped on her dad again and pulled back his hair.

"Ow!" he cried.

"Hair dye is effective," the filly said, "but it's just so hard to get the roots, isn't it? And your roots are...aha!" A few of the ponies huddled to look. "Brown!"

And so came a third gasp. Then they all squinted at Red Shoes.

"She's right!" Twilight declared. "They *do* look the same!"

"I can't believe I haven't seen it before!" Applejack exclaimed.

"They're identical!" Fluttershy marveled.

"Of course!" Rarity said. "What are the odds of Pinkie finding a *second* pony as insane as her?"

"But they don't have the same cutie mark," Cherry noted, pointing to his flank.

"That's because it's painted," Blueberry claimed.

She pulled out a wash cloth and window spray from under her hat, spritzed some on her father's flank and scrubbed it hard. Soon, the picture of the glasses and clown nose chipped away to reveal a grilled cheese sandwich split apart to look like an accordion.

Naturally, every pony gasped again. Red Shoes, or rather Cheese Sandwich, sobbed.

"No!" Pinkie shouted, stepping in front of her husband. "It's not a cutie mark! It's a...tattoo! Which he was covering up! Because..."

"It's okay, honey," Cheese Sandwich said, gently pushing her aside. "The Swiss is out of the bag." He looked apologetically at the ponies. "Yes, I've been Cheese Sandwich this whole time, but you should know it was nothing personal." He looked down at his befuddled daughters. "I may not be Red Shoes, but I'm still your father." He was now speaking directly to Blueberry. "I don't know how you did it, but you saw right through my disguise."

"The only thing I couldn't figure out is," Blueberry said, "why?"

He hung his head. "I was on the run. My crazy ex-girlfriend wouldn't leave me alone! Believe me, she's crazy! Even crazier than Pinkie here!"

"Hey!" Pinkie shouted.

"I told you! She's the *bad* crazy! I moved from town to town, but no matter where I went, she always found me! She's a mad stalker! So...I created a new identity. I couldn't plan parties, for that would give myself away, but since I could already do things that defied logic, I became a clown slash magician. I dyed my hair red and painted over my cutie mark.

"It worked for a while, but she kept showing up in every town I went. I then found myself in Ponyville, and then..." he turned to his wife, "I bumped into Pinkie Pie. I knew it was dangerous to ask her out and it felt bad lying to her, but...she was just so fun and beautiful... It didn't take long for her to figure me out though. She knew me better than any pony else. She promised to keep my secret though and..." He looked down at the Tri-Pies. "Well, life happened."

Every pony stared at him in silence.

"So let me get this straight," Applejack said. "You cooked up this elaborate scheme just so you could escape an ex-girlfriend?"

Cheese Sandwich nodded and then grew nervous again. "And my Cheesy Sense tells me she's coming to town! If she finds me, I'm toast! No pun intended!"

"Wait," Blueberry said, remembering something. "This ex-girlfriend of yours, she wouldn't happen to be a pegasus, would she?"

Her father's eyes widened. "Yeah."

"Is she white?"

"Yes."

"Blonde?"

"Yes."

"Purple eyes."

"Yes."

"Cutie mark of three purple balloons?"

"Yeah. How did you...?"

"I saw her in town yesterday. She was asking about you."

Cheese Sandwich stiffened. "WHAT?!"

At that moment, the door burst open and a gust of wind blew into the room, extinguishing all the candles and closing the shutters. Every pony squinted at the dark figure standing in the doorway, her glowing purple eyes narrowing maliciously.

"Hello, Cheese," said a female voice.

Cheese Sandwich shrieked and ducked behind his wife.

"There's no use hiding," the mare said, advancing towards him. "I know it's you. Your dye-job can't fool me."

"Surprise!" Cheese exclaimed nervously. "What a nice...surprise!"

Twilight used her horn to light the room and every pony could see the mischievous look on the blonde pegasus' white face, the horn giving it an evil glow.

"Finally," she chuckled, "after ten years of searching, I've found you at last! Now we can settle the score between us."

"Back off, Blondie!" Pinkie shouted. "He's mine!"

"Oh, relax, Pink. I'm not trying to steal your hubbie. I just wanna give him something. Something that I've been wanting to give him for a long, long time."

Cheese gulped. "What?"

Her smile grew wider.

"Your scarf. You left it at my apartment, silly!"

Every pony sighed in relief as she held up a green scarf. Fluttershy then opened the shutters to let the light in. Surprise now had a friendly and cheery look about her.

"Oh," Cheese Sandwich said, blushing with embarrassment as he got up and took the scarf. "Thanks."

"Yeah!" Surprise piped. "I spent all these years trying to get it back to you, but you kept running away!"

"A scarf?" Rarity uttered. "All this...over a *scarf* ?!"

"What's she talking about?"

Cheese laughed nervously. "Oh, it's a *really* funny story."

"Well, I've got plenty of time! While I'm here, why don't you introduce me to your cute little family?"

"Ooh!" Pinkie squealed. "I'll get the onion dip!"

A few minutes later, the ponies were laughing and talking as they

ate potato chips with onion dip.

"Oh, Pinkie!" Surprise snorted. "You are *so* funny!"

"Thanks!" Pinkie exclaimed.

"Oh, Cheese, she's an absolute gem! And you have such adorable little fillies! Triplets, yet! You are one lucky stallion!"

"Thanks," Cheese chuckled. "How did you find my house, anyway?"

"Well, after realizing Blueberry was your daughter, I followed her home."

Blueberry scrunched her nose. "How did you know that? I didn't know my dad was Cheese Sandwich."

Surprise smiled. "You have the same ears."

"Does this mean you're going to dye your hair brown, Daddy?" Raspberry asked.

"Well," her father sighed, "I'm going to have to announce to every pony who I really am, but I won't dye my hair back if you girls don't want me to."

"I think you should, Dad," Blueberry insisted. "I mean we might be used to seeing you as a redhead, but I really think you should be yourself from now on."

Cherry and Raspberry nodded in agreement.

"Besides," Blueberry continued, "it doesn't matter if you're Red Shoes or Cheese Sandwich. You're still our dad."

Cheese smiled as he lifted the blue filly onto his knee. "I would've never come out of hiding if it weren't for you, little filly."

"You know, Cheese," Surprise giggled. "If you didn't want your scarf back, all you had to do was say so. You didn't have to take on a whole new identity."

"Actually," Cheese laughed, "I thought you were trying to get revenge on me for breaking up with you!"

"Seriously?"

"Seriously!"

They both burst out laughing. Surprise then nudged him playfully.

"Oh, Cheese! I may be loony, but I'm not the jealous type! Sure, I was upset at first, but I've moved on! I'm engaged!"

"Congratulations!" Rarity exclaimed. "Who?"

"Oh, he's this wacky stallion I met in Las Pegasus. His name's Red Shoes."

Every pony fell silent. Surprise glanced between them in confusion.

"What?"

"Aw, look!" Raspberry said dreamily, pointing to a picture of their parents at Sugar Cube Corner. "Mom and Dad on their first date."

The Tri-Pies were in the attic again, looking through another photo album.

"And here's Dad proposing to Mom," Cherry said, tapping the page. "With the giant balloon of them getting married!"

Blueberry chuckled. "It's nice to know Dad loves Mom no matter what he calls himself."

Raspberry turned the page and let out another dreamy sigh. "Aw! Mom and Dad's wedding!"

"Daddy looks good in a tux!" Cherry chimed. "And Mom looks beautiful in a wedding dress!" She snorted. "Though I think she ate too much wedding cake. Look at her belly."

Indeed, despite the wedding dress, their mother's large belly was

obvious.

"Wait a minute," Blueberry said, looking at the bottom of the page. "Look at the date this picture was taken."

Raspberry shrugged. "So? We all know what day they got married. We celebrate their anniversary every year."

"Yeah, but...have you ever noticed that...?"

"Noticed what?" Cherry inquired.

"Well, this picture was taken eight months before we were born."

"So?"

"A pony gestation period lasts eleven months."

Raspberry and Cherry tilted their heads in confusion. Blueberry rolled her eyes.

"It takes eleven months for a pony to have a baby!"

"Oh!" the two of them said in unison.

"Wait," Cherry said, pointing at their mom's stomach. "Are you saying that...we were in Mom's belly three months before she and Dad got married?"

"I thought we came from the stork," Raspberry said, scratching her head.

The three of them looked at each other, silently agreeing on a solution.

"MOM!"

Pinkie flinched as she heard the shouts from her daughters. She put her hoof to her head and groaned.

"I *really* gotta keep them out of the attic."

After "Pinkie Pride," I tried so hard not to get into CheesePie. Didn't succeed. So I thought how am I going to incorporate this into my BOD universe when Pinkie's married to Red Shoes? Then I realized something freaky. In the few details I gave Red Shoes, he was orange! Just like Cheese Sandwich! And then this crazy idea hatched up. I also wanted to write more about Blueberry, since she doesn't seem to have a lot of love.

Oh yeah, and Surprise cameo!

April Foals

Gemstone was walking down the path towards the Cutie Mark Crusaders Clubhouse. At least, she thought she was going that way. She stopped at a fork in the road and frowned.

"Was the Clubhouse left or right?" she asked herself. "And which way's left again?"

"Pssst."

She glanced around, trying to find the source of the voice.

"Gem!"

A rainbow head popped out of the bush beside her. The pony's blue hoof beckoned her close.

"Over here!" she whispered.

"Prism?" Gemstone responded. "What are you doing in there?"

The unicorn filly let out a cry as the pegasus dragged her into the bush.

"Stay down!" Prism whispered harshly. "And keep quiet!"

"What's going on?" Gemstone inquired.

Prism tucked some of the branches aside so she could get a view of the crossroad. "I'm waiting for the Tri-Pies."

"But why are we hiding?"

"Because I'm gonna prank them so hard, they'll shame their grandchildren! All nine of them!"

"Nine?"

"Their mom had triplets. They're sure to have them too."

"But why would you want to prank them?"

"Because every April Foals' Day, they get every pony, including me, with an elaborate prank and are named the Supreme April Foals! Well, not this year! This year, *I'm* getting the ultimate prankster title!"

Gemstone blinked. "April Foals' Day?"

Prism rolled her eyes. "Come on, Gem! Don't tell me you haven't heard of April Foals' Day?!"

"Oh, I've heard of it. I just forgot it was today. That would explain that piece of paper that was stuck to my tail this morning. By the way, what does *Kach Ne* mean?"

"For once, Gem, be glad you can't read."

"Oh, I never liked April Foals' Day. The colts and fillies back in Canterlot would always play mean tricks on me. Last year, they glued the teacher's Bunk Cap to my head."

"The *what* cap?"

"The Bunk Cap. It was this tall cone hat the teacher put on our heads whenever we were misbehaving and then sent us to the corner..."

" *Dunce* , Gem! *Dunce* !"

The unicorn gasped. "I'm not a dunce! How dare you?!"

"No, I didn't..." Prism put her hoof to my head. "Never mind. Anyway, I've been thinking about how I was going to get back at the Tri-Pies ever since last April Foals' Day, and after careful planning, I think I've finally got it!"

"What?"

Prism smiled as she pulled out an airhorn. "Once they come, I'm going to jump out in front of them and blow this airhorn in their faces!"

The pegasus waited eagerly for her friend's response, but she only raised an eyebrow at her.

"You've been planning this all year," the unicorn said flatly, "and that was the best you could come up with?"

Prism bit her lip. "Actually, this was my mom's idea."

Gemstone shook her head.

"So I'm not an ingenious prankster! Sue me! It's better than a 'Kick Me' sign."

The unicorn gasped. "No wonder every pony kept kicking me in the flank!"

"Shush! I see them!"

The two fillies ducked as the Tri-Pies came up the road.

"This is gonna be great!" Prism snickered. "Imagine, my name will go down in history as the filly who pranked the Tri-Pies!"

"My name too, right?" Gemstone asked.

"Yeah," Prism replied, patting her on the back. "Sure."

The unicorn eyed her skeptically. "How will I know my name will really be there when I can't even read it?"

"Just trust me. Okay, Gem?"

"How do I know you're telling the truth? Are you April Foaling me? I suppose there's an alligator behind me too?"

"I'm not April Foaling you! Now shut up or you'll blow our cover!"

"Why should *you* blow the horn? Why can't I?"

"You'll drop it."

"I won't!" Gemstone grabbed the airhorn. "Give it to me!"

"Gem!" Prism cried, trying to wrench it out of her hooves. "Now you'll break it!"

"Let me blow it!"

"No!"

"Let me!"

"No!

"LET ME!"

Prism next "No!" was blocked out by the loud sound of the airhorn. They both covered their ears, dropping the object in the process. But it was not that horn that had blown, it was three color-coded ones sticking into the bush: one red, one pink, one blue. Three heads of each color then appeared.

"APRIL FOALS!" they shouted.

The Tri-Pies laughed as Prism and Gemstone crawled angrily out of the bush.

"Great going, Gem!" Prism accused. "You blew it!"

"No, I didn't blow it!" Gemstone insisted. "You wouldn't let me, remember?"

"Actually," Cherry said, "we knew you were in there all along."

"What?" the unicorn and pegasus said in unison.

"Blueberry figured it out," Raspberry declared.

"All it took was a little deduction," Blueberry nodded. "The airhorn was sticking out of your saddle bag at school today."

"Darn it!" Prism exclaimed, stamping her hoof.

"Wow, you three sure are good at pranks," Gemstone said in awe.

"The best of the best," Cherry said, rubbing her hoof on her chest.

"You must be! If you got your cutie marks in it!"

"What?!" the Tri-Pies exclaimed. "Where?!"

They looked at their flanks, but they were bare. Gemstone giggled.

"Made you look! April Foals!"

The triplets were a little disappointed, but they laughed anyway.

"Good one, Gem!" Raspberry complimented.

"Gem!" Prism gasped. "You just pranked the Tri-Pies! You know what this means?"

The unicorn blinked. "What?"

She shrieked as a jester hat was placed on her head.

"You're the new Supreme April Foal!" Cherry declared.

"Congrats, Gem!" Prism said, flinging her hooves around her friend. "I would've never expected *you* to get the best of them!"

"Oh, really?" Gemstone said with a smirk. "Well, you know what else you didn't expect?"

"No," the pegasus said, pulling away from her. "What?"

The unicorn took off the hat and reached behind her head. "What you didn't expect is that I..."

She pulled down a zipper and her white suit fell to her sides.

"...am really you!"

The Tri-Pies gasped as another Prism stood where Gemstone had been. The first Prism only smiled.

"Well played. But if you're me, then by process of elimination..."

She reached behind her head and pulled down a zipper of her own, showing Gemstone in a Prism suit.

"I must be you!"

The Tri-Pies gasped again.

"Aha!" Prism exclaimed. "But I'm also," she pulled down another zipper, revealing herself to be Fancy Pants, "your father!"

Another gasp from the triplets.

"Ooh!" Raspberry exclaimed. "Plot twist!"

"Impressive," Gemstone nodded, "but what you didn't know is that I'm," another zipper and she was Fleur-de-lils, "your ex-girlfriend!"

"But I'm really Spike!"

"And I'm Gummy!"

"I'm Braeburn!"

"I'm Scootaloo!"

"I'm Pinkie Pie!"

"I'm Rainbow Dash!"

"Ooh! Hi, Dashie!"

Blueberry yawned. "Okay, this is getting silly."

"Ooh!" Cherry chimed, reaching over her head. "Who am I?" She pulled down a zipper. "Hey, what do ya know? I'm Derpy! And now I have a sudden craving for muffins!"

Blueberry tapped her chin. "Then I must be..." She too brought a zipper down from her head. "Discord! Oh, yeah!"

Every pony turned to Raspberry. She stared at them for a while and then sighed in defeat.

"Fine!"

She pulled down her zipper and out of the magenta filly suit came an

orange pegasus mare with brown hair and a blue beret on her head. Every pony scrunched their noses in confusion.

"Who the heck are *you* ?" Rainbow Dash hollered.

The orange pegasus shrugged. "Oh, no pony special, just the person who's in total control of your lives. Well, at least for the rest of the page."

" *You* ?!" Discord huffed. "What can *you* do? I don't see a magic horn. If you had one, it would've poked through that beret of yours!"

"Your cutie mark says 'DF,'" Pinkie noted after examining the pony's behind. "What does that even mean?"

"I'm surprised you don't even know, Pinkie," the orange pegasus said. "What with you breaking the fourth wall and all."

"Hey, how did you know my name?! And how did you know about the fourth wall?!"

"Maybe I should demonstrate."

The mysterious pony pulled out a laptop and typed some words into it. When she clicked save, there was a flash and all the other ponies disappeared. DF smiled and winked at the screen.

"April Foals, every pony!"

Fun little random snippet for one of my favorite holidays! The day being diabolical is allowed! MWAHAHAHAHA!

Yes, slight "Penguins of Madagascar" reference in here.

Weekend at Uncle Discord's: Day One

I'm baaaaaack! At least I never leave you on a cliffhanger for this story, though this one ended up as a two-parter, because I got stuck. It's not that exciting, but I hope you like it.

"What do you mean you're leaving?"

"Sorry, RJ," Scootaloo said as she packed her suitcase. "But Snips and Snails booked us a gig in Las Pegasus. As much as I love hanging with you guys, we rock stars gotta make a living. Don't worry. I won't be long. We'll be gone for three days tops."

"But who's gonna take care of us while you're gone?" Prism demanded. "And don't tell me you're leaving the twins in charge! Not even Mom trusts them!"

"Thunder!" yelled Lightning from the kitchen. "That was *my* cookie!"

"Really?" Thunder's voice retorted. "I didn't see your name on it!"

"You already had ten cookies, you pig! That cookie should've been mine!"

Scootaloo and Prism cringed as they heard the sounds of two ponies wrestling each other to the ground.

"Don't worry, I'm not stupid," Scootaloo said. "That's why I asked Fluttershy if she could take you for the weekend."

That turned Prism's frown upside-down. "You mean we get to spend the weekend with Uncle Discord and Aunt Fluttershy?"

The twins stopped their fighting and poked their heads into Scootaloo's room.

"Did we hear you say we're staying at Screwball's for the weekend?" Lightning inquired.

"Awesome!" Thunder exclaimed. "You know what that means!"

"PARTY!" they both shouted.

"Hold it, you two!" Scootaloo commanded. "You're not throwing any parties without responsible adult supervision."

"Okay!" they cried, their excitement not wavering.

"And no, Discord does not count as a responsible adult."

That put a damper on their mood.

"Oh well," Lightning shrugged. "Their house is still the coolest!"

Thunder nodded. "With the bouncy room..."

"The bowling alley..."

"The ball pit..."

"The rocket launcher..."

"We don't need to throw a party to *par-tay* !"

"And we get to hang out with one of our best friends!"

"And Uncle Discord!" Prism squeaked. "He's the best uncle ever! And what's not to love about Aunt Fluttershy? Oh, you're still my favorite though, Scootaloo."

Scootaloo laughed. "Sounds like you kids will have fun. Hope it makes up for the fact that I'm bailing on you guys."

"Oh, we'll be fine," Lightning said, waving her hoof. "You just have fun in Las Pegasus, the party capital of Equestria… Wait, can we…?"

"No!"

"You're soooooo lucky!" Cherry Pie piped as the five best friends

trotted down the steps of the school that Friday afternoon. "Sometimes I wish my parents would leave us more often, so we can stay at Uncle Discord's whenever we want!"

"You guys could always come over and hang out," Prism said.

"Can't," Blueberry said, shaking her head. "Mom is throwing a big 'Coming Out of Hiding' party for Dad and we need to be there."

"Oh, right," said Gemstone. "That whole thing about your dad being not your dad but still your dad, but he really wasn't and..." She put her hoof to her head. "My head hurts."

"What are you doing this weekend, Gem?" Raspberry asked.

"Mummy's going to the doctor's and wants me to come with her. Today's the day we find out if I'm getting a baby brother or sister."

"Neato!" Cherry chimed. "Which do you want it to be?"

The unicorn took a moment to think. "I don't know. Mummy and Daddy want it to be a boy, since they already have a girl, they said. But if I had a little sister, we could play dolls, dress-up..."

"Steady there," Prism interrupted. "Having siblings isn't all fun and games. My sister rarely ever plays with me and my brother's just annoying."

"But they're older," Blueberry pointed out.

"And *we're* sisters!" Raspberry squealed. "And we're the best of friends!"

"Yeah," Prism snorted. "But you guys've been joined at the hip since birth."

Gemstone sighed. "It doesn't matter what it is. When the baby arrives, I want to help out anyway I can, but I don't know if I'll be a good sister or not."

The pegasus smiled and put her hoof around the unicorn. "Hey, you'll be a great sister."

Gemstone looked at her wearily. "How can you know that?"

"You're a good friend, and like the Tri-Pies said, siblings are friends for life." Prism then pouted. "No matter how annoying."

"Hey, Penguin!"

The fillies turned to see Kicks waving to them. "Come here! I wanna talk to ya!"

Gemstone rolled her eyes. "Didn't he get the message after you punched him in the shoulder today?"

"He probably wants a black eye for dessert!" Cherry growled, pounding her hooves together.

"Simmer down, guys," Prism said calmly. "I got this."

She stomped up to the green pegasus colt, her eyes narrowed at him.

"Whatever it is, make it snappy. My ride's coming any minute."

"Fine," Kicks said gruffly. He then moaned as he rubbed his shoulder. "You hit me pretty hard today."

Prism chuckled. "That's what you get for calling Gem 'dumb.'"

"You know I didn't mean it. I have a cousin who has autism."

"Then why'd you pick on her?"

"Same reason you punched me. I've got a reputation to uphold. Anyway, our little fight today got me thinking…" He looked her in the eye and grinned shyly. "You doing anything this weekend?"

Prism raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

He circled his hoof in the dirt. "Well...I was gonna catch the new Daring Do movie and...I know you like the books and I was wondering..."

"Hold on. I sock you in the shoulder and your first thought is to ask

me out?"

The colt nodded and the filly crossed her hooves.

"You really are something, Kicks."

He blushed. "So...can you?"

Prism shook her head in exasperation. "We've been over this! You've got your rep, I've got mine. And I told you I'm not interested in colts yet. Besides, I'm staying with my Uncle Discord and Aunt Fluttershy for the weekend, so I'll be busy."

Kicks frowned. "Oh. Well...okay."

She felt a little bad as soon as she saw that sad face. Hurting his shoulder was one thing, but hurting his feelings was another. However, it was the way things had to be. She glanced back at her friends, who were watching in anticipation.

"Listen," Prism whispered. "My friends are kind of expecting me to give you a black eye, so..."

Kicks' face lit up. "Okay!"

She shook her head with a sigh and threw her hoof in his face. He collapsed to the ground, but she had made sure not to hit too hard, only because she pitied him. He looked up at her with his good eye and smiled in gratitude.

"Yup," she grumbled as she returned to her friends. "You *really* are something."

"What was that all about?" Gemstone inquired.

"Eh," Prism shrugged. "He was nagging on my non-existent love life."

"Typical," Raspberry groaned.

"Boys," Blueberry said, shaking her head. "Do they ever learn?"

Every filly and colt jumped at the roar of a motor. They all looked in the direction of the sound and out of nowhere came a long, grand motorcycle. It skidded to a halt in front of the Cutie Mark Crusaders and they smiled once they noticed the driver.

"Uncle Discord!" they shouted.

The draconequus was wearing a black helmet, motorcycle jacket and sunglasses to match. He lowered his sunglasses to get a look at the fillies.

"Hey there," he greeted. "Any of you lovely ladies care for a ride?"

Prism did not hesitate to jump on the bike. Discord snapped his fingers and made a helmet appear on her head.

"You're the awesomest uncle ever!" Prism exclaimed as she gripped her hooves around his waist.

Discord huffed. "Was there ever any doubt? Shall we be off, my dear?"

He was about to squeeze the handle of the bike when Gemstone cried, "Wait! Uncle Discord, is it alright if I come by tomorrow afternoon? I need Prism to help me with my homework."

"Of course!" Discord replied cheerfully. "The more, the merrier!" He then pressed down on the handle and the motorcycle let out a growl. "Ta-ta, my little ponies!"

After popping a wheelie, the bike zoomed at hyper speed, leaving a trail of flames burning into the road. The Tri-Pies and Gemstone waved as it disappeared, while the other foals stood with their mouths agape.

When Discord and Prism slid into the living room of his castle, Fluttershy let out a squeak and scooped her baby Zany up in her hooves. When she turned around, however, she sighed in relief. That relief quickly turned to anger.

"Discord, you frightened me!"

The draconequus took off his helmet and shook his head. "Sorry, honey."

He leaned down and kissed her forehead, then Zany's. Fluttershy then noticed that Prism was with him.

"Discord," she said again, putting down Zany and flying up to the filly. "I told you to stop giving foals rides on this thing!" She set Prism down on the floor. "It's dangerous!"

"Hey!" Discord protested. "I put a helmet on her, didn't I?"

"That was awesome!" Prism exclaimed, taking her helmet off. "You're the best, Uncle Discord!"

"Oh, stop," he chuckled.

There was a long pause and then he looked expectantly at the filly.

"I didn't mean literally."

"Discord," Fluttershy giggled, "that's enough."

"So where are the others?" Prism asked.

"They're all in the ball pit."

"WHAT?!" Discord exclaimed. "You let Screwball and that changeling into the ball pit *alone* ?!"

"No. Thunder and Lightning are with them."

"And you trust *them* ?!"

He teleported himself and Prism to a room in the castle filled with colorful rubber balls. They went up to Discord's middle, but Prism had to dig to get some air.

"MOTHBALL!" Discord bellowed. "YOU BETTER NOT BE FOOLING AROUND WITH MY DAUGHTER!"

He yelped as a red ball hit him in the back of the head. He spun around when he heard snickering.

"Who threw that?!"

Thunder's head popped out of the pit, a mischievous look on his face.

"Can't catch me!" he taunted.

He laughed as he submerged. Discord gritted his teeth together in a growl.

"Why, you little..."

He put his paw and claw together and dove in after him. Prism looked around; trying to find any signs of life, but it was as though she was the only one in the sea of rubber balls. She shrieked as something grabbed her leg and pulled her under. Then a hoof slapped over her mouth and her eyes met two endless purple swirls.

"Shush!" Screwball whispered. "Come with me, if you want to live."

The chaotic pony used her magic to make a small tunnel so they could move easily through the pit. Deep within, they reached an air pocket. Lightning Dash was there, wearing an army helmet, crouched behind a barricade of gummy bears and beside a pink flag with a picture of a screw and a ball, matching Screwball's cutie mark.

"Commander!" Lightning exclaimed. "You found a new recruit!"

"What's going on?" Prism finally asked.

"We're playing Capture the Flag," Screwball explained.

"In a ball pit?"

"Sure, why not? It's girls against boys. Thunder and Mothball just recruited Daddy."

"They've got a chaotic being," Lightning said, "we've got a chaotic

being. That makes us even."

"Not really. Daddy's got over a thousand years of experience on me."

"Can't you just summon the enemy's flag with your magic?" Prism inquired.

"Well, sure, but where's the fun in that?"

"That's why we made the rule," Lightning added. "No teleportation or levitation spells of any kind. The game would end too fast otherwise. So, you in, little sis?"

"You bet!" Prism said excitedly.

"Welcome to Team Screwball!" the chaotic pony exclaimed, slapping an army helmet on the filly.

"So what do I do?"

"Right now," Lightning said, stepping out from the barricade, "you're on guard duty. I'm gonna try and infiltrate the enemy camp. And please, kid, don't mess this up."

Prism shot her sister a glare as she dashed through the tunnel opposite the one she had entered with Screwball.

"I'm gonna scour the terrain," Screwball said, summoning a radar in her hoof, "and watch out for any intruders."

"And me?" the filly questioned.

"Stand guard. Don't let any pony reach the flag."

She glanced down as the device in her hoof beeped.

"Ooh! My honey bunch is 10 feet beneath us. I'll meet him halfway there! Maybe we can finally get a kiss!"

She was suddenly dressed in a yellow swimsuit and bathing cap and dived further into the pit in the same manner her father had done

before. Thus, Prism was left alone with the gummy bear fort. She sighed heavily.

"I'm missing out on all the action!"

She looked up at the flag and then shrugged. "Might as well do the best I can."

Prism stomped her hoof, straightened up and stood firmly in front of the flagpole.

"No pony's getting by me! No pony!"

"Well, how about a draconequus?"

The filly yipped in surprise and spun around to see Discord standing behind her, wearing a helmet similar to hers. After feeling the top of her head, she realized it *was* her helmet!

"Hey!" Prism cried, jumping up to reach her helmet. "Give that back!"

"As you wish," Discord said with a shrug, dropping the helmet on the filly's head. "It's not what I'm here for, anyway."

He chuckled as he plucked the pink flag from its pole as if it were a flower petal. Prism charged at him, but he effortlessly pushed her back with his claw. He continued to hold her head as he watched her legs flail wildly.

"Oh, this is too easy," he snickered. "Well, as fun as this is, I have a game to win!"

His head turned into a drill and he bored through the rubber balls.

"Hey!" Prism called, attempting to follow him. "Come back here with that!"

But as soon as she was in the tunnel, it started to collapse and balls were raining down on her. Her hooves dug with all their might, but the pit was so thick! Soon she heard a cry of victory from Discord and Thunder Dash.

"Yeah!" she heard her brother say. "Boys rule and girls drool!"

There was a "humph" from Lightning. "I should've known not to leave Prism on guard duty."

"Where's Mothball? We're supposed to be celebrating!"

"Wait a minute," Discord's voice said. "Where's my daughter?" Prism jumped as she heard an angry yell. "YOU LITTLE INSECT! YOU TWO ARE MAKING OUT DOWN THERE, AREN'T YOU?!"

She heard him dive further into the pit.

"Let's get out of here," her sister's voice said.

"Yeah," Thunder's voice agreed. "Let's find the bowling alley."

"Wait!" Prism shouted. "Guys, help!"

She was stuck in the middle of the pit and had lost all sense of direction. She lashed out her hooves and tried to move as many balls aside as possible. She wished she wasn't so small. Even for a filly her age, she was considered small. Not particularly in height (only one inch below average), but in physique. She had a few muscles in her legs from playground fights, but not enough to dig herself out of a ball pit. Her waist was thin, so it felt like the pit was closing in on her until it fit her tiny body.

Prism had to get out, or else she might suffocate! *You can do this, Prism. Mom says when you lose your sense of direction, go up.* Of course, that rule mostly applied to flying, but she could still dig upwards.

She struggled to lift her hooves and dig as straight up as she could. In a few moments, she could see light and she breathed in a gulp of air as her head broke the surface.

"Look, guys!" she cried. "I made it!"

She looked around the room, but she appeared to be the only one in there.

"Oh come on, guys! This isn't funny!"

She froze when she saw a dorsal fin rise out of the pit.

"Guys?"

She screamed when she felt something grab her leg and jumped so high, she found herself on the ceiling. Her eyes narrowed when she heard two familiar laughs. Lightning's and Thunder's heads rose out of the pit, a fake dorsal fin on the latter's.

"Wow, sis!" Lightning guffawed. "That's the highest I've *ever* seen you fly!"

"I can't believe it!" Thunder snickered. "You actually thought there was a shark in the ball pit!"

"Not funny!" Prism yelled.

She then looked down, or rather up, at her hooves and realized they were stuck to the ceiling, and that it was a long way down.

"Guys! Get me down from here!"

But the twins were too busy laughing to hear her.

"Thunder? Lightning? Help!"

It was at that moment when Fluttershy opened the door. She gasped when she saw Prism's position.

"Did you kids scare your little sister again?" she demanded.

"Lighten up, Aunt Fluttershy!" Thunder grinned. "It was just a joke."

"Oh dear."

She flew up to Prism and took her in her hooves.

"Come on, sweetie, why don't you help me make a snack in the kitchen?"

"What a baby," Prism heard Lightning whisper. "Nine years old and

she still needs some pony to carry her around like a little baby!"

The younger pegasus growled at her siblings. Fluttershy did not set her down until they reached the kitchen.

"How do cheese and crackers sound to you?"

Prism's only response was a groan.

"I'll take that as a yes."

"Why do they always treat me like a baby?" the filly demanded.

Fluttershy shrugged as she got a box of crackers from the cupboard. "It just seems that way sometimes."

"Why? Because I'm little? Because I can't fly?"

"I'm sure they mean well."

"But they're always picking on me and never let me hang out with them! Why are they such jerks, Aunt Fluttershy?"

"Oh, 'jerks' is a strong word, don't you think, dear?"

"But why?"

Fluttershy sighed. "I never had siblings of my own, so I don't know what you're going through. However, my animals often rivaled with their siblings. Sometimes, I had to put them in separate meadows to keep them from fighting."

Prism huffed. "Boy, would I *love* to be miles away from the twins."

"You know? When Zany arrived, Screwball wasn't too excited about him either. After a few months, however, they became the best of friends."

"But I'm nine years old and they still treat me like a baby!"

"They're your family, Prism. I'm sure they love you."

"Yeah. They love to make my life miserable."

"Maybe if you knew how hard it was to be the older sibling, you wouldn't think that."

"If *I* was the older sibling, I'd have the time of my life."

Various reasons as to why I wanted to write something like this. I wanted to show some of the daily household life for the Discord family now that Mothball has moved in (to understand the story behind that, you'll have to read "Daughter of Discord"), I wanted to write something about the relationship between the Dash siblings, and I couldn't help but wonder where they stayed while their parents as well as Scootaloo were away working. Oh yes, and there will be more in the second part of this chapter.

Weekend at Uncle Discord's: Day Two

Ooh boy, seeing the length of this chapter you'll understand why Part Two took so long.

It was a sure sign this day was going to be a disaster when Zany suddenly started crying in his highchair.

"Oh goodness," Fluttershy said, taking her baby into her hooves.

"Not again!" Discord groaned. "What's he crying about this time?"

"Maybe he's hungry."

"We just fed him six gallons of chocolate milk!"

"That's it! He needs burping!"

Fluttershy laid him over her shoulder and patted him gently on the back. He let out a burp loud enough to shake the entire castle.

"P.U.!" Discord exclaimed, summoning a plug for his nose. "No more chocolate for you, mister!"

The infant started wailing again.

"Now look what you've done!" Fluttershy scowled.

"What?" Discord said. "I didn't think he'd take it *that* hard!"

He covered his ears as Zany's cries grew louder. "Shut up! Your sister was never this whiny!"

That very same sister burst into the kitchen.

"Mom!" Screwball panted. "In the garden! The beavers and chipmunks are at it again!"

"Oh dear," Fluttershy squeaked. "Here, take Zany."

She dropped the baby into her husband's paw and claw before following her daughter.

"Oh, sure!" Discord complained. "Give me the hard job!"

Zany wailed again to make sure he was being acknowledged.

"I know, I know!" his father yelled.

He sniffed the foal's diaper and put the nose plug back on. "Yep, it's the diaper."

Discord snapped his fingers so Zany's dirty diaper was replaced with a clean one. Sadly, the baby would not stop whining. The draconequus sighed, as he had prayed it would not come to this.

" *Please do not cry, my dear,* " he sang. " *Your daddy is still very here…* "

But Zany still wouldn't cease his tantrum and started kicking his hooves.

"Oh, come on! It worked on your sister!"

Just outside the kitchen, Thunder and Lightning were engaged in a paintball match.

"Come back here, you!" Thunder yelled, shooting blue paint at her.

Lightning laughed as she jumped out of the way. "You shoot like a girl!"

"Hey, take that back!"

"Catch me if you can!"

"Yah!"

He fired again, but this time, the paintball soared past its target and into the kitchen, hitting Discord squarely in the back of the head. Zany stopped crying for a moment and chuckled at the situation.

"Uh oh," the twins said.

Discord's head spun around like an owl's, his eyes glaring dangerously at the two hooligans.

"That," he uttered, "was a mistake."

He slowly set his son down and made a four-star army helmet appear on his head and a machine gun in his paw and claw. The twins watched in horror as he aimed the terrifying weapon at them.

"Say hello to my little friend."

The two teenagers did not hesitate to run.

"You won't get away that easily!" Discord shouted as he flew after them.

In the living room, Prism was concentrating on her math homework so she could help Gemstone when she came over.

"Ugh," she groaned. "I hate long division."

Her ears perked up when she heard two screams and a battle cry, followed by a series of shots.

"What in the…?" she said, turning around.

She saw the paint bullets just in time to duck out of the way. They missed her, but not the paper on the coffee table.

"My homework!" Prism cried, picking up the paint-splattered sheet.

"Hide us!" the twins exclaimed as they jumped over to Prism's side of the couch.

Their sister angrily waved the piece of paper in their faces. "You guys always ruin my stuff! Mrs. Cheerilee's gonna kill me if I…"

"Gotcha!"

Discord's head popped up behind the couch and the twins made another break for it.

"Come and fight, you miscreants!"

"Uncle Discord!" Prism whined. "They destroyed my homework!"

"Not now, Rainbow Junior! I've got twins to annihilate!"

"But they killed my homework!"

"And I'm gonna kill *them* !"

When Fluttershy returned, she found the living room walls and furniture covered in paint, her husband chasing the twins around with a machine gun, and Prism chasing Discord around with a painted piece of paper.

"Discord, where's Zany?!" Fluttershy demanded.

Discord stopped in his tracks for a moment. "Where's Screwball? Wasn't she with you?"

He gasped and summoned a second machine gun. "IF SHE'S WITH THAT CHANGELING BOY, I'LL BLAST THEM BOTH TO KINGDOM COME!"

He teleported away before Fluttershy could ask again about Zany. Her answer came when she heard him screaming in the kitchen. She gasped when she saw her baby floating upside-down and banging pots and pans.

"Oh, goodness!"

Fluttershy zoomed over to Zany, cradled him in her hooves and tried to calm him down.

" *Hush now, quiet now…* "

Her singing was interrupted by shouting in the other room: "Look what you did!"

"It wasn't our fault!" Thunder insisted. "Uncle Discord's crazy!"

" *You* were the one who hit him!" Lightning exclaimed, punching him

in the shoulder.

" *You* were the one who dodged out of the way!"

"Why you guys gotta ruin everything?!" Prism screeched.

By the time Fluttershy re-entered the living room, her husband was there, scolding Screwball and her changeling boyfriend, Mothball.

"HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TWO THAT YOU ARE NOT TO COME WITHIN TWELVE INCHES OF EACH OTHER?!"

"Dad, we were only holding hooves!" Screwball protested.

"Oh, but holding hooves leads to kissing, and kissing leads to making out, and making out leads to…"

"Would you cut it out?! I'm nearly sixteen! Don't you trust me?!"

"Oh, I trust you." He darted his eyes at the changeling. "It's *him* I don't trust!"

Mothball hid behind Screwball. "Don't let him hurt me!"

"Fix it!" Prism shouted as she shoved her homework in the twins' faces.

"It's covered in paint!" Lightning retorted. "How can we fix it?"

"IF YOU EVER GO NEAR MY DAUGHTER AGAIN…"

"STOP BABYING ME!"

"WAAAAAH!"

"YOU'RE ALWAYS WRECKING MY STUFF!"

"WAAAAAH!"

"YOU'RE ALWAYS GETTING IN OUR WAY!"

"I CAN HOLD HOOVES WITH WHOMEVER I…"

"WAAAAAH!

"WHY DON'T YOU JUST…?"

"WAAAAAH!"

"I WILL RIP YOU APART UNTIL ALL YOUR INSIDES ARE…"

"SINCE THEY DAY YOU WERE BORN YOU'VE ALWAYS…"

"WAAAAAH!"

"WHY DON'T YOU EAT IT WHILE YOU'RE AT…?"

"QUIIIIIIIIIIEEEEEEEEEEEET!"

Every pony, including Zany, fell silent and turned to the angry yellow pegasus.

"Screwball, stop sneaking off with Mothball! It's irresponsible! Discord, get off their backs! They're in love! Deal with it! Lightning, Thunder, apologize to your sister! Prism, the answer is six!"

The filly glanced at her ruined homework. "Doesn't do much good now."

Fluttershy turned to her husband. "Discord, fix it!"

Not taking his eyes off her, Discord snapped his fingers and Prism's homework was clean and pressed.

"As for *you two* ," Fluttershy snapped as she flew into the twins' faces, "I've told you hundreds of times not to paintball outside of the arena! You'll both have plenty of time to think about what you've done while you're cleaning up every bit of paint in this house!"

"What?!" the twins exclaimed.

"That'll take forever!" Thunder whined.

"Well then," Fluttershy huffed, "I suggest you get started."

The twins glared at their sister while Discord watched his wife in

awe.

"I love it when she does that," he whispered.

Fluttershy raised an eyebrow at him. " *You're* helping."

"No prob."

He raised his fingers to snap, but she stopped them with her hoof.

"No magic."

He groaned. "Can I at least summon a mop?"

"Alright. But if anything comes to life, you're sleeping on the couch tonight! Screwball, take your brother!"

After Fluttershy handed Zany to Screwball and Discord zapped up three mops, the draconequus let out a dreamy sigh.

"I taught her well."

"Aunt Fluttershy!" Prism called. "Can you help me with my math?"

Fluttershy groaned as she gripped her head. "Fine!"

The filly followed her into the kitchen, but as soon as they got there, Fluttershy collapsed into one of the chairs and her head flopped onto the table.

"You okay, Aunt Fluttershy?" Prism inquired.

The mare raised her head slowly to look at the filly. "I'm sorry, sweetie. I've just…ugh! So much has been going on lately! I haven't had a break since the Grand Galloping Gala! With the baby and Screwball's boyfriend living here and us taking care of you for the weekend…"

She trailed off as she let her head fall again.

"Gee," Prism said, glancing down at her paper. "I…guess I'll figure this long division stuff out myself."

"That'd be nice," Fluttershy said in a muffled voice.

"Maybe you need a vacation, Aunt Fluttershy."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," the mare said as she rose again. "Last time I left Zany with a babysitter, he was kidnapped by changelings."

Prism grinned as a thought occurred to her. " *I* can watch him!"

Fluttershy shook her head with a smile. "That's sweet of you honey, but you're too young to be handling a baby."

"Come on! I can get my cutie mark in babysitting!"

"But you're only nine, and Zany's no ordinary baby…"

"Then get Screwball to help me or something! The point is, you don't look too good and I wanna get my cutie mark."

"Prism…"

"Please?"

"But you don't know the first thing about taking care of a…"

"Then teach me! Please? Please, please, please, *please* !"

Fluttershy found that she had lost her voice as the filly pouted right in her face.

"Well…"

A loud crash from the living room interrupted her train of thought.

"Great going, Lightning! You dropped the bucket!"

"Me? It was *your* elbow!"

"Yeah, but *you* nudged it with your shoulder!"

Fluttershy forced a smile. "You know what? We *really* need a vacation!"

"Yes!" Prism cheered, her tiny wings fluttering with excitement.

"But Screwball, Mothball and the twins have to stay with you!"

The filly shrugged. "No problem."

She wasn't going to miss out on an opportunity to show her older siblings that she could do something grown-up.

Meanwhile, in the living room, Discord was holding the twins apart to keep them from killing each other.

"As chaotic as this is," he said, "you two are making even more of a mess with all this fighting, and the messier this place gets, the more trouble I'm going to get in with Fluttershy and the more I'm going to have to clean up!"

"Actually," Fluttershy said, flying up to him, "I have a better way to spend the day."

Discord dropped the twins and grinned excitedly. "What did you have in mind?"

She pulled him aside. "Discord, how long has it been since we've had quality alone time together?"

He tapped his chin as he thought about it. He couldn't think of a recent time it had been just the two of them. Even at night, they were always so exhausted from the baby that as soon as Zany was asleep, they would collapse on the bed. Even when Zany wasn't causing trouble, Discord was always making sure that changeling was keeping his distance from Screwball and Fluttershy would be feeding all her little pets in the garden. Whenever they did find themselves alone, something would always interrupt them, like Zany's cries or Screwball asking if she and Mothball could go out.

Indeed, life had gotten in the way of things.

"Let's see…" he thought aloud. "It was…right after the big changeling fiasco."

Fluttershy looked at him wearily. "Eight months ago."

"Wow. It *has* been a while since we spent any real time together."

She smiled up at him. "Then what say we take the day off and go to the spa or something?"

Discord huffed. "Honey, we have a spa right here."

"I mean go someplace far away without having the children interrupting us," she whispered slyly.

"Mmm," he moaned. "Sounds tempting, but there's no way I'm leaving Screwball alone with that little stinkbug!"

"Honey, they've been together for months. Can't you trust them?"

"And what about you, constantly fretting over Zany?"

"Screwball's a responsible big sister and will watch over him. Besides, she's got help from her friends. And, as a bonus, you won't have to clean the house."

Discord still didn't trust leaving Screwball and Mothball alone together, but his wife's humongous, adorable, pleading eyes were impossible to resist.

"Oh, alright."

Fluttershy grinned and called upstairs. "Screwball!"

Screwball teleported in front of them, her little brother in her hooves.

"Your father and I are going out for the day," her mother explained, "and we're leaving you in charge."

"Okay, Mom," Screwball replied.

"But while we're gone," Discord commanded, "you and that changeling boy aren't getting anywhere further than first base, understand?"

"What's first base?" Prism asked.

Lightning patted her younger sister's head. "You'll find out when

you're older, squirt."

"And no wild parties," Fluttershy insisted, talking especially to the twins. "You two are to finish cleaning up this room before doing anything else. Screwball, make sure the animals get fed their lunch, okay?"

"Ooh!" Prism said, jumping up. "Don't forget about me!"

"Oh, yes. Prism wants to learn about taking care of foals, so…"

"I'll teach her what she needs to know," Screwball finished.

Fluttershy beamed with pride at her daughter, but then her face turned serious. "And please don't let Zany out of your sight, after what happened last…"

"Relax, Mom. I would never let anything happen to Zany. Isn't that right, little bro?"

The baby gurgled in agreement, which made Screwball smile and cuddle him close. Prism grunted at the sight. *Thunder and Lightning never hug* me *like that.*

"You wanna hold him?" Screwball asked, noticing how Prism was looking at Zany.

The filly nodded excitedly and held out her hooves as Screwball handed the infant to her. Prism had to pull him to her chest so she wouldn't lose her balance. He was a lot heavier than she guessed him to be.

"How old is he again?" she asked.

"Thirteen months," Screwball replied. "In due time, he'll be walking. You know, without the aid of magic."

Prism cried out as Zany tugged some of her hair with his mouth.

"Oh, don't worry," Screwball assured her. "That's just a sign that he likes you."

"Well," Discord said, clapping his paw and claw together. "Looks like they'll be okay on their own!" In a flash, a Hawaiian shirt appeared on his torso, along with a pair of sunglasses on his head and a suitcase in his claw. "Come on, honey! We're free!"

"Just one moment," Fluttershy said. She floated down and kissed her son on the forehead. "You be good now, sweetie. Mommy will be back soon."

"Mommy!" Zany squealed.

Fluttershy giggled. "Yes, that's right."

"Fluttershy!" Discord called from the doorway. "Let's go before the spa closes!"

The pegasus rolled her eyes as she followed her husband out. "Alright, alright. I wasn't taking *that* long."

The twins waited a while after they had shut the door and then turned excitedly toward their friend.

"So what's the plan?" Lightning asked.

"Yeah, we gonna throw a party or what?" Thunder pleaded.

"No, guys," Screwball said seriously. "My parents are counting on me not to burn the house down." She blushed. "This time. Besides, I've gotta take care of my brother here."

"Don't forget I'm helping!" Prism piped.

Lightning laughed. "You? Take care of a baby? Please! You can't even take care of yourself!"

The filly narrowed her eyes at her sister. "Yes, I can! What about all those times you left me home alone or at the park, huh? I was just fine on my own!"

Screwball blinked in surprise. "You left your sister alone at the park?"

"Just once," Thunder insisted.

"Twice!" Prism exclaimed.

"We didn't just *leave* you at the park!" Lightning hollered. "You kept wandering off all the time!"

"Well, it's not like you were watching me or anything!"

"You were supposed to stay close to us the entire time!"

"How do you expect me to do that with you two flying so fast?"

"It's not our fault you can't fly! And what about the second time when we were playing hide-and-seek? You gave up searching for us!"

"Cuz you guys cheated and changed hiding places! It's no wonder Mom can never trust you and leaves me with Aunt Scootaloo all the time!"

"No! Mom leaves you with Aunt Scootaloo because you're so immature that you need constant supervision!"

"Ugh! Why you gotta be such jerks?!"

"Why *you* gotta be such a baby?!"

"Stop it! Just stop it! You've been picking on me since the day I was born!"

"Cuz you've been a pain in our flanks since the day you were born! Waking us up at odd hours, wandering off and getting us in trouble, pestering us when we're trying to do our homework…"

"And what about you? Never taking time to play with me, never helping me when I need help, always wrecking my stuff, acting like I don't exist…"

"Can I say something?" Thunder asked.

"NO!" both sisters shouted.

"You have no idea what it's like being responsible for some pony

else!" Lightning declared.

"I know that if *I* was the older sibling," Prism snorted, "I'd be a lot better at it than you!"

Their quarrel was interrupted by Zany's whines. Screwball picked her brother up and glared at the Dash sisters.

"That's enough, you guys!" she commanded. "Now you've gotten Zany all upset. Come on, Prism. We'll take him upstairs and calm him down."

Prism sent her siblings one last angry look before following the chaotic pony.

"Now when changing his diaper, you must be careful when you open it up, because baby colts like to…well…"

"I think I get it," Prism said.

They were in Zany's nursery and Screwball was showing Prism how to change a diaper. Usually, she would just zap a clean one on, but Prism didn't have magic. Since Zany didn't need a new diaper at the moment, they were practicing on dolls. Mothball, because he didn't have anything better to do, was sitting beside them and trying to put the diaper on his pony doll. It was easier for him because he had the horn.

"Like this?" Prism asked, holding up her newly changed doll.

"Perfect," Screwball commended. "Of course, it'll be a lot harder doing it on an actual foal."

She gasped suddenly and turned around to see her brother tugging on her tail.

"Oh," she grinned, taking him into her hooves. "He wants to play."

Prism scrunched her nose in confusion. "How do you know?"

"When you spend so much time with a baby, you just know. His favorite game is peek-a-boo."

Screwball set the infant down and covered her eyes. "Where's Zany?"

Prism gasped as the little colt vanished into thin air. She was about to scream when he reappeared on top of his sister's head. Screwball uncovered her eyes and looked up with a smile.

"There he is!" she exclaimed, grabbing him.

Zany laughed and wriggled in delight. Then Screwball brought him to her face and blew a raspberry into his belly, which made him laugh even more. Then he opened his mouth and cried:

"Suh! Suh!"

"You want a song?" Screwball asked.

"Suh! Suh!" Zany repeated clapping his hooves.

"Okay. I know your favorite."

"Watch this," Mothball whispered to Prism.

In a flash of light, a puppet theater appeared before them and five ducks on metal sticks popped into the window. Prism and Mothball made themselves comfortable as Screwball began to sing:

" *Five little ducks went out one day…* "

The five ducklings bounced around as if they were waddling.

" *Over the hills and far away…* "

A hill appeared in the background, which the little ducks went over before disappearing beneath the window. A larger duck then came into view.

" *Mother Duck said: quack, quack, quack, quack!* "

The Mother Duck opened her beak with every "quack!"

" *But only four little ducks came back.* "

And, sure enough, four of the duck puppets returned. Prism glanced over at Zany and could've sworn he looked sad.

Screwball continued singing until all the little ducks had come back to their mother. By that time, Zany's red spiral eyes were closed.

"Ooh," Screwball whispered, quietly poofing the theater away. "Looks like it's time for his nap."

Prism and Mothball watched in awe as Screwball floated over to the crib and gently placed Zany inside. After pulling a quilt over him and tucking a stuffed dragon in with him, she leaned forward and kissed him on the forehead. She and the others then slowly tiptoed out of the room and closed the door.

"Wow," Prism uttered.

"Yeah," Mothball whispered. "Isn't she great with kids?"

"He'll probably be up in an hour or so," said Screwball. "In the meantime, how about some lunch?"

"Oh, finally!" Mothball exclaimed. "I'm starving!"

"Here you go, sweetie."

A large chocolate shake appeared in the changeling's hooves and he eagerly began slurping it up. All he ever ate these days was chocolate, as it was a near substitute for love. That was one of the reasons he and Screwball were perfect for each other, because that's what she usually conjured up.

A few minutes later, Screwball and Prism sat in the kitchen, chewing on peanut butter and marshmallow sandwiches. Mothball had taken the platter into the living room to give to the twins. Prism then noticed her homework still sitting on the table and asked Screwball for help on the next question. Fortunately, Screwball was pretty good at math.

"And when you bring the seven up here…" Screwball said as she

was finishing up her explanation.

"The answer is seventeen!" Prism exclaimed. "I get it now! Thanks, Screwy!" The filly paused as she looked up at the older filly. "Gee, you're good."

Screwball tilted her head. "At math?"

"At everything! You take care of Zany, you make great sandwiches, and you helped me with my homework!"

Prism surprised her by hugging her foreleg. "I wish I had a big sister like you."

Screwball laughed nervously. "Well, gee, Prism, that's really nice of you, but…don't you already have a big sister?"

The pegasus frowned. "Yeah, but she's not a *real* sister, like you. Thunder's no better."

"Aw, don't be like that. They really do care for you, Prism. The twins and I have been best friends since we were in diapers. They're not such big jerks like you think."

"Then why are they always picking on me?"

"They're probably just jealous."

"Of what?"

Screwball was about to answer when the crow of a rooster echoed throughout the house.

"One sec. Some pony's at the door."

"Did you get a new doorbell?" Prism asked.

"Daddy changes it every week or so."

When Screwball opened the door, she found Applejack standing there with an orange baby buggy.

"Aunt Applejack!" Screwball exclaimed, welcoming the cowgirl in.

"What are you doing here?"

Applejack raised an eyebrow. "Didn't yerr parents tell ya? They were supposed to watch little Applespike today while I was helpin' with Pinkie's party."

The teenager's spiral eyes widened. "Oh gosh! They must've forgotten! Mom and Dad just stepped out for the afternoon."

This worried the farm pony. "Oh. Well…that's a shame, cuz…Spike's in Canterlot helpin' Twilight with her wedding preparations, the kids are with friends, Big Mac and Cheerilee are out and Granny Smith's just too tired today to watch a baby! And I can't take Applespike with me! Last time I took him to a party, he melted the cake!"

"Melted? Not burned?"

"No, melted." Applejack sighed. "Guess I'm gonna have to tell Pinkie I can't make it…"

"Now hold on!" Prism exclaimed as she rushed into the room. "We can still watch Applespike while you're busy! Another baby gets me another chance at getting a babysitting cutie mark!"

"Oh, right," Lightning snorted from the couch. "Have a nine-year-old take care of *two* babies."

Applejack glanced around nervously. "It's just you kids?"

"Yeah, but I'm always watching Zany and Applespike," Screwball insisted. "Plus, I've got help."

"I don't know. Can ya really handle a half-dragon, half-pony baby *plus* a spawn of Discord?"

Screwball rolled her swirly eyes. "You ask that all the time! It'll be a cinch with my chaotic powers keeping them in line."

"I'm still not comfortable with leaving my baby alone with a bunch of…oh, Prism, don't stick yerr hoof in there! His fangs are comin' in and he breathes fire!"

"Yipe!" Prism squealed as she wrenched her hoof away from the baby carriage.

"Relax, Aunt Applejack," Screwball assured her. "Everything's under control."

The cowgirl bit her lip. "Well, okay. I trust ya, Screwy." She reached into her saddlebag and pulled out an extensive list. "Now, here are some important things to remember."

As she opened her mouth to speak, the long piece of parchment fell on Prism's head.

"It's okay," Screwball said. "We still have a list from last time."

"Yeah, but I made revisions," Applejack insisted.

Prism lifted the list away from her face to read some of it: " *Keep his milk at a steady temperature of 86.7 degrees, otherwise he won't drink it. There's a fireproof hanky in the bag in case he sneezes. If he starts chewing on stuff, give him his teething ring. If he gets hungry, there's some crushed amethyst in the bag. Don't feed him a whole one or he'll break his teeth. Don't give him any garnet. He hates garnet.* "

"Everything's in the bag," Applejack said, pointing to the baby bag tucked beneath the carriage. "Now, if he gets really fussy, give him his binky. If he eats it, there's a spare in the bag, and a spare for the spare."

"Yes, yes, I know," Screwball grumbled. "He's in good hooves, Aunt Applejack. You just go have fun."

"Right, right." The cowgirl leaned over the buggy and patted her foal's green head. "You be good now, Lil' Spikey. I won't be long. I'll be back at five."

Applejack then kissed him on the forehead and reluctantly went out the door. Prism stood on her back legs so she could peer into the carriage and look at the strange foal that was now sucking on his binky. He looked like a regular foal, with orange fur and a tuft of green hair on the top of his head, until you saw the little tail

decorated in green spikes coming out of his diaper. You would know for sure that the baby wasn't normal when he opened his green reptilian eyes.

"How is it possible for a pony and a dragon to have a baby, anyway?" Prism couldn't help but ask.

Screwball cringed. "Ask again when you're older. Come on, let's get Applespike situated in the nursery."

As Mothball and Prism followed her upstairs, the twins watched in envy.

"How do you like that?" Lightning said. "They barely noticed we were even here!"

"Yeah, those babies sure are cute, aren't they?" Thunder agreed.

Lightning pouted and looked at the paint-splattered wall. "We need to refill the bucket. Where do they keep the cleaning supplies around here?"

"Why not just ask Screwy to poof some up?"

"She's too busy with the little ones," she huffed as she leapt off the couch. "Besides, this'll give us a chance to explore."

Thunder sighed as he followed his sister down a hallway of doors. There were so many rooms in this house that they couldn't remember what was where.

"How come *we* always have to clean up the messes?" Lightning questioned as she opened a door to a basketball court.

"Um…didn't we make the mess?" Thunder replied as he peered into a room filled with bouncy balls.

"Yeah, but even when it's not ours!" The next door led to the inside of a barn filled with cows and pigs. "Remember when Prism was five and broke the cookie plate?"

"Sure, but she was little. Kids *never* have to clean up their messes."

Thunder yelped as a manticore roared in his face and he quickly slammed the door shut.

"Little kids get away with *everything* ."

"And what do we do?"

They shared a look and said together, "Clean up after them."

"Man," Thunder grunted. "What I would give to be a kid again."

"And never have to do any work," Lightning agreed.

The next door she opened revealed a small garden of blue grass with a pink stone path leading from the door to a well.

"Hey, check this out."

Thunder turned to see what his sister was looking at. "They have a wishing well here?"

"Thunder," Lightning said, rolling her eyes, "this is the Castle of Chaos. They have *everything* here."

Her brother stepped toward the well. "You think it might actually grant wishes?"

His sister shrugged. "Uncle Discord created this place, so I wouldn't be surprised. Let's find out."

They walked up to the well and Lightning's hoof touched a small pot of bits with Discord's face on them. They looked up and saw the sign that read: *1 bit=1 wish* .

"Cool," Lightning said, taking a Discord coin from the pot.

"Wait," Thunder said, touching her hoof. "You've seen those movies. The whole "be careful what you wish for" thing? Every time some pony's wish comes true, there's always a catch!"

His sister rolled her eyes. "This isn't a movie, bro. This is real life. And I wish for a motorcycle."

"No!"

But Thunder was not quick enough to stop her from tossing the coin in the well. After they heard a small splash, a large, red motorcycle appeared beside them.

"Whoa!" Thunder gawked.

"See?" Lightning smirked, hopping onto the vehicle. "What I tell ya?"

She pressed the handlebars, but frowned when the engine didn't start. Thunder couldn't help but laugh.

"You got your motorcycle, alright. Too bad it didn't give you a *working* one."

"Shut up," Lightning grunted, sliding off the bike.

"I'd hate to say I told you so…"

"Then don't, or else you'll get my hoof in your cheeks!"

"Okay, chill!"

"Let's make another wish," she said, picking up another coin. "Only this time, we'll be more specific."

"What you gonna wish for?" Thunder asked.

"You know how we were talking about how Prism gets away with everything because she's the younger sibling?"

He groaned. "Yeah."

"And how she said if *she* was *our* big sister, she'd be better at it?"

"Yeah, right! Like *she* could handle something like that!"

"I just wish she knew what it was like to be the older sibling," she said, dropping the coin into the well.

"Yeah," Thunder muttered, picking another one up and throwing it in. "And I wish *we* could be the younger siblings."

Lightning stiffened as her brother's coin hit the water. "Uh, Thunder, do you really think that was a good…?"

She was cut off as a flash of light blinded them.

"Ah," Discord sighed as he stretched out on the massage table. "We should've done this *years* ago!"

Fluttershy, lying on the table next to him, sighed in agreement as the spa mare gently rubbed her shoulders. "Better late than never."

The spa mare massaging Discord jumped back as the draconequus suddenly shivered uncontrollably.

"That's strange," he muttered once it had ended.

"What's strange?" Fluttershy asked.

"I just sensed a magical imbalance somewhere."

Fluttershy's eyes widened with concern. "You don't think Screwball or Zany…?"

"Nah, they're probably just playing an elaborate game or something, but whatever it is, Screwy can handle it."

Fluttershy relaxed and slid her eyes shut again. "You're right. It's probably nothing to worry about."

Screwball, Mothball and Prism watched as Applespike slept in his buggy, sucking on his pacifier.

"Man, babies are cute," Prism whispered.

"Aren't they?" Screwball replied quietly. "I think I might have some of my own, someday."

Mothball gulped at the thought. "Um…"

Their heads shot up when they heard the sound of babies crying.

"Do you hear that?" Screwball asked.

"Is Zany awake?" Prism inquired.

They all turned their heads and saw that the chaotic infant was sleeping peacefully.

"But," Mothball stammered. "If they're not making that noise…"

"Let's find out what is," Screwball finished.

The three of them walked out into the hallway and followed the sound downstairs, through a second hallway and to an open door. Once they looked inside, they gasped at the source of the crying.

"Oh…" said Mothball.

"My…" said Prism.

"Celestia," said Screwball.

Before them was a garden, and in that garden was a well. Sitting against that well were two tiny, light blue foals in diapers. The one on the left had a short, but wild, orange and yellow mane with a thin streak of red in the middle. The other had a mane just as wild, only black and blue with a streak of purple. Both of them had red-violet eyes. They were bawling their eyes out.

They were much younger, but their identities were unmistakable.

"Thunder and Lightning?!" Screwball exclaimed.

Prism was in hysterics. "Are those…but how…my…twins…brother…sister…they…babies?!"

Screwball rushed over to the crying infants, took Lightning in her hooves and tried to calm her down. Mothball did the same with Thunder.

"How did this happen?" he asked, looking at his girlfriend. "Did you

do something?"

"Why would I turn my best friends into babies?" Screwball said, narrowing her eyes. "Besides, I haven't perfected age spells yet!"

"Then what the heck happened?!" Prism demanded.

Screwball glanced at the sign on the well. "Huh. Dad never told me he put in a wishing well."

"Wishing well?! They wished to be *babies* ?!"

"It would seem so."

"Well, don't just stand there! Do your chaos magic thing and turn them back!"

"Didn't you hear me? I can't do age spells! Sure, my magic is advanced, but age spells are difficult, even for chaotic beings!"

"Why don't we just use this wishing well and wish them back?" Mothball asked.

Screwball shook her head. "You guys know nothing about wishcraft, especially where my dad is concerned. With every wish comes a price. Wishing them back might bring unexpected consequences."

"How so?"

"Well, if we wish them big again, they might grow to be fifty feet tall."

"What if we wish them back to normal?"

Screwball sighed. "Mothball, how many times have I told you there's no such thing as normal?"

"Hmm. I'm beginning to see your point."

"I can't take the risk of something bad happening. Dad should be able to turn them back."

"Then teleport over to that spa and bring him back!" Prism demanded.

"No! He and Mom deserve a day off! We'll have to wait until they come home."

"What?! Don't you understand the situation here?! My brother and sister are babies!" Prism paused as the scowl on her face slowly disappeared. "My brother and sister are babies." A wide grin took its place. "My brother and sister are babies! Do you know what this means?"

"We have more diapers to change?" Mothball replied, holding the whining Thunder away from him.

"That means *I'm* the oldest sibling!" Prism cackled as she glanced between the baby twins. "You hear that, guys? *I'm* the big sister now!"

The filly jumped back as the two infants cried in her face.

"Well, if you're the big sister, then…" Mothball placed Thunder in her hooves and ran. "Here!"

"Hey!" Prism screamed as the changeling raced out of the room.

"Mothball, come back!" Screwball hollered. "Coward."

Prism gulped as she stared at her whining brother. "How do you get these things to stop crying?"

"They're probably hungry."

She summoned two bottles of milk which floated into the twins' mouths. They stopped crying and sucked on the nipples in satisfaction. Screwball held Lightning's bottle up and signaled to Prism to do the same for Thunder.

"Man, they sure are hungry," the filly observed. "Then again, they've always had a huge appetite."

Thunder then closed his mouth and milk poured onto his face. He then spat some out with a laugh.

"Thunder!" Prism hollered, practically shoving the bottle down his

throat. "Keep it down!"

"Gently," Screwball whispered.

"But he…"

"Shhh. He's only a foal."

"No, he's not! He's fifteen!"

"Well, right now, he isn't."

Prism grunted as she pulled the empty bottle out of her brother's mouth. "There. All done." She held Thunder up in front of her and smiled. "You know, bro? You're kind of cute as a…"

He interrupted her by opening his mouth and upchucking half-digested milk. Prism gawked as she looked down at the mess on her chest.

"Did…did you see…?"

"Oh boy," Screwball said, setting down Lightning and taking Thunder. "Some pony drank a little too fast."

Prism's mouth was open in disbelief as she watched Screwball calmly put Thunder over her shoulder and pat him on the back.

"But he…he just…aren't you gonna punish him or something?! He just puked all over me!"

"He didn't mean to."

"Of course, he did! It's Thunder Dash!"

"I'll clean it up for you."

In a flash, Prism's fur no longer smelled and was all clean. It didn't make her any less angry, however.

"Screwball!"

The girls looked up to see Mothball standing in the doorway and

looking very worried.

"Applespike and Zany are gone!"

"Gone?!" Screwball gasped.

"I went to check on them and they're not in their cribs or anywhere in the nursery!"

"Oh boy. Zany's playing hide-and-seek again!" She put down Thunder. "Prism, you watch the twins while Mothball and I look for the boys."

"What?!" Prism exclaimed. "You're leaving me with the little devils?!"

"It won't take long. Zany won't go far since Dad put the magical baby barrier around the castle. I just wish he wouldn't take Applespike on his little excursions!"

She and Mothball vanished before Prism could protest. She glanced down at her now baby brother and sister, who were giggling in delight.

"What are *you* looking at?" she demanded.

Suddenly, a foul smell filled the air and Prism covered her nose. She looked at the twins and groaned in annoyance.

"No. There is no way that I'm…"

The babies then started bawling.

"Okay, okay! I'll change your stinky diapers!" She glanced around the garden. "As soon as I find some."

She then remembered Applespike's bag and figured there must've been diapers in there somewhere. Then she recalled that they were in the nursery, which meant she would have to carry both her brother and sister upstairs. This would not be an easy task, because she could barely hold one baby without stumbling over, and she couldn't walk on two hooves.

Then she had an idea and turned to the twins.

"Who wants a piggyback ride?" she asked, squatting down.

The babies stopped crying and then cheered in excitement. Prism cringed as they crawled onto her back and cried out when they clutched to her mane and tail for support. When she was sure they were settled on her back, she attempted to rise.

"Whoa!" she exclaimed. "How is it at one-foot-tall, you guys are as heavy as rocks?"

Prism made slow, steady steps. She cursed her tiny wings, knowing this would be easier if she could fly. She also knew the stink from the twins' diapers would take forever to wash out. It didn't help that they kept bouncing up and down and kicking her in the sides. She felt like she was going to lose it when Thunder started pulling at her mane.

When she finally made it into the living room, she heard the crow of the rooster. She groaned as she started trotting toward the door.

"This day just keeps getting better and better!"

She opened the door and gasped when she saw a yellow earth pony with green eyes, freckles and an orange mane tied into two braids. It was Thunder Dash's girlfriend.

"Apple Blossom!" Prism gasped.

"Howdy, Prism!" Apple Blossom greeted warmly. "Is yerr brother here?"

The pegasus filly cringed as she tried to hide the foals behind her head. "No! He, uh, stepped out!"

"Oh. Well, I was hopin' he could go to Cheese's party with me today. Do ya know when he'll be back?"

"Uh, who knows? He might take hours! In fact, he's probably on his way to the party right now! Why don't you go see? Bye!"

She was about to shut the door when Apple Blossom looked down and stopped her. "Wait."

Prism followed her gaze and noticed Thunder reaching up and trying to grab at one of her pigtails. Prism glanced at her half bare back.

"How did…?"

Apple Blossom giggled as she picked up the baby colt. "Who's this little darlin'?"

"Uh…" the filly stammered. How could she explain to this girl that that baby was her boyfriend? "My, uh…baby cousin! Yeah! These are my cousins!"

"Hmm, should've figured. This one looks just like Thunder. I didn't know you folks had cousins."

"Well, we do!"

The earth pony sniffed the air. "Phew! They could use a change, though."

"Right! Hey! Since you're here, why don't you help me carry them upstairs and get them changed?"

"Well, I'm supposed to be at the party by now…"

"Great! Come on!"

Apple Blossom shrugged and followed the filly up to the nursery. The earth pony's eyes widened when she saw her cousin's empty baby buggy.

"Hey, didn't Auntie Applejack leave lil' Applespike here?"

Prism gulped. "Uh, yeah! He and Zany are…playing hide-and-seek! With Screwball! Outside!"

She began rummaging through Applespike's baby bag before Apple Blossom could question further.

"Aha!" the filly cried out as she produced a clean diaper.

She then frowned once she realized there were three holes in it.

"What the…?" she said, looking through the extra hole.

"Oh," Apple Blossom chuckled. "Auntie Applejack and Uncle Spike cut that for Lil' Spike's tail."

"Well that doesn't help me with Thu…I mean, my cousins, because something else can come through that hole!"

"Calm down. There's a package of diapers in the corner there."

Prism looked to where she was pointing and sighed with relief. "I'm saved!"

She decided to change Thunder's diaper first, since his was the smelliest.

"Hold still!" she grunted. "Stop…moving! Ew, gross! What have you been eating?!"

After a tough battle, Prism finally managed to get the diaper secured on her brother. She sighed in exasperation.

"Here," Apple Blossom said, setting Lightning next to Prism. "I did the lil' lady for ya."

"But…" Prism wheezed, "how…?"

"I've had to change Applespike's diaper a few times. It takes practice. Look, I'd love to stick around, but I promised Auntie Applejack I'd help her out a bit. I swear, sometimes that gal works too hard."

"Wait…" the filly gasped as Apple Blossom walked out of the room. "Don't…leave…me…"

She collapsed onto the rug. She didn't even flinch when Lightning started chewing on her tail.

"I hate my life," Prism groaned.

She stiffened when she heard laughter above her and looked up to see Thunder walking on the ceiling!

"What in the…?"

She gasped when Lightning floated past her head.

"You've gotta be kidding me! Even as babies you guys are better flyers than me!"

She had to get them down. She couldn't control them while they were up there. She jumped up and fluttered her wings as hard as she could, but they could only get her up a few inches. She lashed out her hooves at Lightning, but her sister laughed and dodged out of the way, allowing Prism to fall on her stomach.

"I'm starting to think you guys did this to make my life miserable," she grumbled. "Is that it?! Is that why you made that stupid wish?! Don't you guys have anything better to do than to ruin my life?!"

She cried out in pain as she felt something sharp at her back leg. She lifted it to find Applespike sinking his teeth into her skin. Applejack certainly wasn't kidding about his fangs!

"Hey, get off!" Prism cried, trying to shake him off.

Applespike immediately let go and started crying. Prism then remembered something Screwball had told her: *Never shake a baby. It'll harm them.*

Great, now *she* was the bad guy.

Then she heard a poof and felt something atop her head. Her eyes glanced up to meet a set of red spirals. She yelped as Zany floated off her head.

"Oh no!" she exclaimed. "Now I've got *four* babies!"

The chaotic foal flew up to Thunder and Lightning and gurgled, as if he was speaking a secret language. The twins then clapped their

hooves and the next thing Prism knew, all four foals had vanished in a flash of light.

"Oh boy," Prism said, searching frantically around the room. "I'm in *big* trouble now!"

She screeched as Screwball appeared in front of her.

"Is he here? I sensed him in here!"

"He just left with Applespike and…" the nine-year-old gulped, "the twins."

Screwball put her hoof to her mouth. "Oh no. Mom is going to kill me!" She gasped. "So is Auntie Applejack!"

"You? What about *me* ? How am I going to explain to Mom and Dad and Aunt Scootaloo that not only did I lose the twins, but they got turned into *babies* ?!"

"Okay, relax. With the magical baby barrier up, Zany won't be able to teleport himself or the other babies outside the castle. Hopefully, he didn't get himself stuck in a wall again."

"But they could be anywhere!"

"We'll find them. Here." Screwball summoned a stuffed pony and handed it to Prism. "Use this to lure them out." She then poofed Zany's stuffed dragon into her hooves. "I'll use Sir Fangs-a-lot."

"Where do we look though? This place is huge!"

"Mothball's out in the garden, so how about you take the first and second floor and I take the third and fourth floor?"

"But how do we tell the other that we've found them?"

Screwball tapped her chin and then a metal earpiece appeared in each of their ears.

"We'll hear each other through these devices. Don't worry. We'll find them."

Screwball held her hoof out and Prism bumped it.

"Let's do this!" the latter exclaimed.

"Found them yet?" Prism asked thirty minutes later.

"Negative in the bouncy room," she heard Screwball say through her earpiece.

"They're not over by the pond," Mothball said (Screwball had given him an earpiece too).

"They're not in the pool," Prism groaned. "Come on! Where could four babies hide?"

"Well, two of them aren't ordinary babies," Screwball sighed, "and three of them can fly."

"What else could possibly go wrong?"

The crow of a rooster answered her question.

"Please tell me those are your parents!" Prism whined.

"I don't know," Screwball said. "I'm too afraid to answer it."

The filly grumbled and trotted back to the living room. This time, Gemstone was at the door, her saddlebag on her back.

"Hi!" she beamed. "Sorry, I'm late, but I forgot the way again. You know, with me not knowing my right and my left and all…"

"Gemstone!" Prism exclaimed, putting her hoof to her face. "I completely forgot! Look, this is a really bad time and…"

"Let her in!" Screwball said into her ear. "We could use all the help we can get!"

"What's going on?" Gemstone asked.

"Gem," Prism said, pulling the unicorn into the room, "we really need

your help!"

"Oh dear. What happened?"

The pegasus took in a deep breath. "I convinced Aunt Fluttershy to take the day off because she looked so tired and I wanted to see if I could get my cutie mark in babysitting but Thunder and Lightning said I couldn't handle something like that and I said I'd show 'em! So Fluttershy and Discord left us with Zany but then Aunt Applejack showed up with Applespike and then Thunder and Lightning turned themselves into babies and started crying and puking and pooping and pulling on my hair and then Zany and Applespike disappeared and took the twins with them so now there are four babies flying around the castle here and if we don't find them, we're gonna be in so much trouble so WE NEED TO FIND THEM NOW!"

Gemstone stared at her friend in confusion. "Um…what?"

Prism groaned. "Zany, Applespike and the twins, who've turned into babies, are missing and I need your help in finding them!"

"Oh. Well, why didn't you say so? Wait, hold on. Did you say the twins, *your* twins, turned into babies?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you later, but now, we need to find them!"

"Okay. Um, where do we look?"

"You take hallway on the left, I'll take the one on the right."

"Which way is left?"

"Never mind, just come with me!"

She grabbed Gemstone's hoof and dragged her down the hallway on the right.

"So how did your brother and sister turn into babies?" Gemstone asked.

"They made some wish in a wishing well."

"There's a wishing well here?"

"Apparently!"

They stopped in their tracks when they heard a crash that sounded like falling pots and pans.

"The kitchen!" Prism exclaimed.

She and Gemstone raced back in the direction they came and into the kitchen. They gasped when they saw the mess. Applespike was on top of the fridge, Zany was opening drawers and taking out the silverware with his magic, Lightning was playing with a flour sack and covering herself in the substance, and Thunder was banging a frying pan against the stove.

"What's that noise?" Screwball asked through Prism's earpiece.

"They're in the kitchen!" Prism replied.

She reached for Zany but backed away when he waved a butter knife at her.

"But your brother's got a knife!"

The chaotic baby laughed and vanished in a flash. The silverware dropped to the floor.

"Never mind. He's gone again."

"Did he take the others with him?" Screwball asked.

"No. They're still here."

"Okay. Mothball and I will continue searching for Zany while you two handle the others."

"But there's like three of them and two of us!"

"Just keep them in your sight and don't let them hurt themselves!"

Prism sighed. "Why do I always get the hard job?"

This entire time, Gemstone had been staring at her friend like she was crazy. "Who are you talking to?"

"Screwball. She wants us to handle the others while she and Mothball find Zany. Looks like you'll get practice at being a big sister, Gem."

The unicorn gulped as she watched Lightning spill a bag of sugar and Thunder bang his frying pan against the ceiling. "Okay."

"You get the twins. I'll get the dragon off the fridge."

"Why don't *you* get the twins? They're *you're* siblings!"

"I don't have time to argue, Gem! Just help me!"

Gemstone sighed. "Fine."

She started with Lightning, since she wasn't flying at the moment. She picked up the tiny filly before she could tip over a sack of potatoes.

"Now, now, little Lightning," Gemstone said sternly. "It's not nice to spill things that don't belong to you."

The unicorn firmly placed Lightning in Zany's highchair, despite the pout on the infant's face.

"Now stay there, while I go get your brother!"

Meanwhile, Prism had been moving a chair in front of the refrigerator while watching Gemstone.

"How did you do that?"

Gemstone shrugged. "I don't know. That's how my mother talks to me when *I* misbehave."

"Well, whatever you're doing, keep doing it!"

The unicorn glanced up at the flying colt. "Easier said than done."

Prism climbed on the chair, but still wasn't high enough to reach

Applespike, so she topped her tower off with Fluttershy's many cookbooks. Gemstone, meanwhile, was also standing on a chair and trying to catch Thunder.

"Thunder!" she cried. "You get down here this instant or…I'll take your dolls away!"

"He doesn't have any dolls!" Prism shouted, shaking her head.

The pegasus filly grinned when she was finally at eye level with the dragon-pony.

"I got you now."

Applespike's only response was a sneeze. That wouldn't have been so bad, if the baby didn't have fire breath. Prism yelped as the top of her head ignited with green flames.

"Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh!" she shrieked, jumping off her tower. "My head's on fire, my head's on fire!"

"Oh my!" Gemstone exclaimed, leaping off her chair. "Hang on!"

The unicorn picked up one of the pots on the floor, filled it with water in the sink and splashed it on her friend. Prism gasped as she slowly got over the shock. Then she narrowed her eyes in anger.

"That's it! No more Miss Nice Pony!" She hopped onto the pile of books. "I'm coming for ya, baby!"

Applespike only laughed tauntingly and thumped his tail on the fridge.

"Oh, you think this is funny, huh? Come here, you!"

She lashed out her hoof at him, but the dragon-pony stuck out his tongue and crawled out of the way. Unfortunately, he didn't see where he was going and dropped off the edge of the refrigerator. Prism gasped.

"Gem, do something!"

The unicorn made an equal gasp and rushed towards the falling baby. To every pony's surprise, blue light engulfed the infant before his head hit the counter. Gemstone's mouth was open as he floated over to her.

"I didn't know you could do that!" Prism gawked.

"Neither did I!" the unicorn exclaimed as she settled the dragon-pony into her hooves.

Applespike had his eyes closed during the fall. He was confused as to why he hadn't hit anything yet. Then he felt hooves around him and opened his reptilian eyes to see who was holding him. Those eyes widened at the sight of a pretty white unicorn with shiny, curly blue hair and eyes like sapphires. He had never seen any pony like her.

The dragon-pony then gurgled with glee as he nuzzled his face in her soft fur.

"Aw," Gemstone said, cradling the tyke in her hooves. "He's so adorable!"

Prism was astonished once again. "How…how'd you get him to be so…calm?"

"I don't know. Maybe I just have a thing with foals."

"Well, can you get Thunder down before he brings the ceiling down on us?"

"Hey, I've only got so many hooves!"

"Use your magic thingy then!"

"But I've never really done anything like that before, and I didn't expect…"

"Just try!"

Gemstone sighed. "Okay."

She looked up at Thunder and tried to concentrate. She thought about bringing him down and suddenly, blue light engulfed his back hoof and slowly tugged him to the floor.

"Wow," Gemstone uttered. "Who knew I could do that too?"

"Finally!" Prism grunted, going over to her brother. "Okay, mister! You're in a time-out!"

She lifted him by his diaper and shoved him in the highchair with Lightning, making it cramped for the two of them.

"And stay there!" their sister shouted.

"Don't be so cruel," Gemstone said as she stroked Applespike's tiny head. "They're only babies."

"Why does every pony keep saying that?! You've seen how much trouble they can cause!"

"But look at them!" the unicorn spoke in a high-pitched voice. "They're so cutesy wootsy with their wittle hooves!"

The sound of a rooster made Prism groan in exasperation. "Now what?!"

She left Gemstone to look after the babies while she went to answer the door. She secretly prayed it was Discord and Fluttershy, so Discord could turn the twins back to normal, but the pony standing in the doorway was the last one she'd expected to see.

It was Kicks with a rose in his hoof.

"Hi!" he squeaked.

Prism put her hoof to her head. "Oh man, not now!"

"I know you said no to going to the movies with me, but I thought you might change your mind, or I could at least give you this…"

"Kicks, this is a really bad time, right now! I'm having a mid-life crisis here! And I'm not even ten yet! So could you just go home and…?"

She shrieked when something landed on her back. She turned her head and gritted her teeth when she saw what it was.

"Zany!"

She tried to grab him, but he evaporated before she could. Then she felt something pull her hair and tail, that something being Thunder and Lightning.

"You little monsters!" Prism shouted as they flew out of her reach.

"What the hay…?" Kicks said as he watched the twins fly toward the chandelier.

"Prism!" Gemstone cried as she rushed into the living room with Applespike on her back. "The twins flew out of the…" She paused when she saw Kicks. "What's he doing here?"

Kicks glanced at the rose and shoved it in his mouth before the unicorn could notice.

"He's, um…" Prism stammered. "He's um…here to…he needs help on his homework too! Yeah! And his parents couldn't help him this weekend! Right, Kicks?"

The colt nodded frantically, his cheeks still puffed up. Gemstone cocked her head.

"Then why'd he ask you?"

Prism bit her lip. "Um…because I was the only one who said yes! Right, Kicks?"

Kicks nodded again, still not opening his mouth.

Gemstone stared at them for a moment and then shook her head. "Never mind. Maybe he can help us here. I don't think my magic can reach that high."

That was right. Kicks could fly! He could reach the twins! As soon as Gemstone's attention was drawn toward the flying babies, Prism turned to the pegasus colt.

"Okay, I'll go to the movies with you," she whispered, "but only if you help us catch those babies!"

Kicks nodded, but he looked like he was in pain.

"You okay?"

The colt spat out what was left of the rose and coughed. "Thorns."

Prism cringed. "Ouch."

"Yeah."

"Now go up there and catch those babies!"

"Right."

He spread his wings and fluttered up towards the chandelier which the twins were rocking back and forth. Prism cried out when Zany reappeared and started dancing on her head. Screwball materialized above them and shouted:

"There you are!"

Zany squealed and zoomed off Prism's head.

"Come back here!" Screwball called, chasing after him.

"I'll get him!" Mothball declared as he hovered into the room.

Above, Kicks managed to snatch Thunder, but the infant grabbed his ear and gave it a hard tug.

"Ow!"

Crying out in pain, Kicks let go of the foal, who snickered as he escaped.

"You're not getting away with that!"

So Kicks chased after Thunder, Screwball flew after Zany and Mothball started pursuing Lightning. Then Applespike started crying with all the ruckus and Gemstone rocked him in her hooves, trying to

calm him down.

Prism looked around at all the chaos happening and found herself on the verge of tears. Finally, she put her hoof down and screamed:

"UUUUUUUUGGGGGHHH!"

The scream was loud enough to bring every pony to a halt.

"I can't take this anymore!" the pegasus filly shouted. "I'm fed up with all this running around! I don't wanna be the older sibling, okay?! It's just too much!"

She crouched down, put her face in her hooves and sobbed. Every pony watched in amazement, not recalling a time they had ever seen the tough little filly cry. Kicks floated down to her and cautiously put his hoof around her. She didn't object.

Suddenly, light enveloped the twins and in a flash, they were back to their teenage selves. They looked down, realized they were in the air and flapped their wings before they could fall.

"Thunder! Lightning!" Screwball exclaimed, snatching Zany before he could get away again. "You're back!"

"What…?" Thunder said, scratching his head.

"Just happened?" Lightning finished, mirroring her brother.

Prism raised her tear-streaked face and lit up at the sight of her older siblings. The twins floated down to her and looked at her with concern.

"Kid," Lightning said, "what's wrong? Why are you cry…?"

She was cut off when their sister threw her hooves around them both.

"You're back! You're big again! Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry! I'll never complain about being the younger sibling again! You guys are the best big brother and big sister ever!"

The twins looked at each other in confusion. "Huh?"

"You mean you guys don't remember?" Mothball asked.

"What's going on here?" Kicks demanded. "How did they turn into…?"

"I think I know how to explain this," Screwball said, summoning a movie screen and popcorn. "Age spells, I cannot do. Windows into the past, however, I *can* do."

When the film had finished, the twins had their mouths open in astonishment.

"Wow," they both said.

Lightning looked to Prism. "You were a terrible big sister."

The filly hung her head. "I know. But it was hard! And you guys were flying around like crazy!"

"How do you think we feel having to watch you all the time? We were actually glad you couldn't fly away." The older sister looked away in guilt. "Then again, we weren't always the best of babysitters. Based on what I saw in this flashback, we were just about as bad as you were: always neglecting you, blaming you for everything…"

"Not so fun being the younger child, huh?" Prism smirked.

"Yeah, well, it's not so fun being the older child either."

"I think I know that now."

Lightning wrapped her hoof around her sister. "But you're right. We have been taking you for granted. After all, you *did* try to keep us out of trouble today. You might've been a lousy big sister, but you tried your best."

Prism grinned. "Thanks. *You're* a lousy big sister, too."

The two laughed as they embraced each other.

"I can't believe Apple Blossom saw me in a diaper!" Thunder exclaimed.

"What I don't get," Gemstone said, "is why you two turned back when you did."

"Hey," Lightning said. "I think I know. When Thunder and I were at that wishing well, I wished that Prism would understand what it was like to be the older sibling. I guess when Prism knew how difficult it was taking care of us, my wish came true and we turned back."

She frowned when she finally noticed Kicks. "Hey, isn't that the kid you're always fighting with at school?"

"No!" Prism and Kicks said at the same time.

"Do you suppose they're alright?" Fluttershy asked her husband as they approached the castle.

"We only left them alone for a few hours," Discord said as he opened the door. "What's the worst that could've happened?"

Fluttershy gasped at how spotless the living room was. Even Discord was surprised, but not at the cleanliness of the room. All the children were gathered in the living room, and no pony was fighting.

Lightning was at the coffee table with Prism, Gemstone and Kicks, helping them with their homework. Thunder and Mothball were playing peek-a-boo with Applespike, while Screwball was floating around the room, bouncing her brother on her back.

Lightning was the first to notice the couple in the doorway. "Oh, you're back!"

Screwball floated down to her parents. "Hi, Mom! Hi, Dad! Did you guys have fun?"

"I…I'm impressed," Fluttershy said.

"As am I," Discord uttered.

Fluttershy took Zany into her hooves and saw that he was still happy and healthy. "I guess I got all worked up over nothing. You all did a good job taking care of things while we were gone."

Applejack appeared beside them and lit up when she saw her baby.

"There you are!" she exclaimed, rushing to Applespike and picking him up. "You've been a good boy?"

Every pony cringed. Gemstone, however, walked up to Applejack with a smile.

"He was darling, actually."

Applespike giggled as he reached out his hoof and gently nudged the filly's blue curls.

"Huh, I think he likes ya," Applejack smirked. "Like father, like son."

"What do you mean?" Gemstone asked.

"You'll find out sooner or later."

"So Gemstone," Prism said, putting a hoof around her friend. "Still think you'll make a terrible big sister?"

The unicorn shook her head. "No. I just hope baby girls aren't as troublesome."

Prism raised an eyebrow. "Baby girl?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you! We found out yesterday. Mummy's having another filly!"

"Wow," Thunder uttered. "Congrats!"

Lightning smirked. "I know you'll be a better big sister than me, kid."

"Gem!" Applespike piped.

"Lil' Spikey seems to think so," Applejack chuckled.

"Maybe we should leave you kids alone more often," Discord observed.

"NO!" the children screamed.

The adults blinked in confusion. Discord folded his arms across his chest.

"What happened?"

Screwball bit her lip. "Let's just say that we should really get rid of that wishing well, Dad."

"Wishing well?" the draconequus repeated. "What wishing well? I never installed a wishing well in here."

His daughter blinked. "But if *you* didn't put it in, and *I* didn't put it in, then who…?"

Every pony directed their attention towards Zany, the only other chaotic being in the house. Prism huffed.

"Nah, it couldn't be."

When no one was looking, Zany glanced over at Applespike. The two babies winked at each other and snickered.

Later that evening, Prism and Kicks walked out of the movie theater, laughing themselves silly.

"That was terrible!" Prism exclaimed.

"Nothing like the books!" Kicks declared.

"And that Ahuizotl costume? Totally fake!"

"Faker than my grandma's teeth!"

They were so busy laughing that at first they didn't notice the group of colts staring at them. When they did, their eyes widened. They were all colts from school, and among them was Pin Cushion, Kicks'

best friend. Prism and Kicks looked at each other in panic.

"Hit me," the latter whispered. "Now!"

"Oh, uh…"

The filly threw up her hoof, hitting him square in the jaw. He fell backward and dropped what was left of his popcorn. The colts shrugged and walked away. When she was sure they weren't paying attention, Prism loomed over the injured colt.

"You okay?"

Kicks smiled up at her and whispered, "Thank you!"

She rolled her eyes. "I'll never understand boys."

So many things I want to say about this chapter! First off, I kind of had to put myself in my little brother's shoes while writing Prism, because I honestly don't know what it's like to be the younger sibling. I had various chaotic ideas for this. Originally, Lightning and Thunder and the others were going to sneak out and leave Prism alone, but then I figured: Screwball would never leave her brother like that! All the revisions in my brain led to this. I kept adding in more characters to add to the comedy. I don't remember how Kicks got in there.

In case none of you have read "Daughter of Discord," Apple Blossom is Cheerilee and Big Mac's daughter.

That "5 Little Ducks" song was something I learned in elementary school, and I sang it to the babies at the hospital I used to volunteer at. I figured Screwball would make it more exciting.

Hope you enjoyed it! Question is: should I write a Day Three?

Weekend at Uncle Discord's: Day Three

Despite the fact that this is "Day Three" at Discord's place, it's not really related to the first two parts. I just couldn't help but wonder what would happen if all five Crusaders had a play date at the Castle of Chaos, and this was the result:

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Gemstone asked Prism as they and the Tri-Pies trotted through the halls of Discord's castle.

"No," Prism said bluntly. "But we're sure to get our cutie marks here. Uncle Discord put *everything* in this place. We'll just open a bunch of doors and do whatever's behind them. Who knows? We might even get our cutie marks in exploring."

"Ooh!" Blueberry piped. "I love exploring!"

"So which door do we go through first?" Raspberry wondered.

"I have an idea!" Cherry chimed, pulling out five straws. "We'll draw straws! The shortest straw picks the first door, the second-shortest picks the next door and so on and so on." She paused. "And so on."

"Where did you even get…?" Prism started to ask. "Never mind. I don't wanna know."

The five of them each took a straw. Gemstone had the shortest straw, followed by Raspberry, Prism, Blueberry and Cherry.

"Oh," the unicorn said. "Okay." She glanced around. "Which one do I pick?"

"Just pick one randomly," Prism replied.

"Random is always fun!" Cherry exclaimed.

Gemstone looked at the doors surrounding her again, trying to single one out. Her eyes fell upon a blue door with a crystal knob.

She thought it was pretty so she tried that one. She stepped inside and screamed when her hoof touched water and jumped back. Before her was a pool, with pink dorsal fins swimming in circles. The others gasped when they saw this.

"Awesome!" Cherry chimed. "There are so many things we can do with a pool of sharks! We can jump over it, swim on their backs, get in a shark cage and see them up close…"

"Oh, I think there was a shark cage in the broom closet," Blueberry said.

"Where?"

"Five doors down."

"Thanks!"

Cherry zoomed off and Blueberry stiffened when she realized what her sister was trying to do.

"Wait, Cherry! Are you sure that's a good…?"

The red filly returned with a cage big enough for an adult pony.

"Excellent!" She opened the cage and stepped inside. "You guys coming?"

"Cherry, isn't this a bit dangerous?" Raspberry asked nervously.

"Even I have to agree!" Prism exclaimed. "You can't just go in there with a bunch of pony eating sharks!"

"Besides," Blueberry stated, "you don't even have scuba gear on."

"Oh!" Cherry gasped. "There was some in the broom closet!"

"Cherry, please!"

The red triplet shortly returned dressed in a bright red scuba suit, complete with tank, goggles and fins.

"Now to venture into the deep! Cherry Bomb!"

"Cherry, no!" every pony shouted.

But they were not fast enough to stop her from leaping into the room, slipping into the cage, locking it up and allowing herself and the cage to fall into the water.

"Some pony's gotta go after her!" Raspberry yelped.

"You kidding?" Prism shrieked. "I'm not going in there!"

"I can't even swim!" Gemstone declared.

"Well, do something!" Raspberry commanded. "She could get hurt down there!"

"We should go get Screwball or Uncle Discord!" Blueberry concluded.

But before anyone could run for help, Cherry's wetsuit floated up to the surface of the water. The four fillies gasped and Raspberry had tears in her eyes.

Suddenly, Cherry came up from the water, riding on a pink dolphin like a cowboy.

"Yee-haw!" she exclaimed. Then she noticed her friends and sisters staring at her with open mouths. "Hey, guys! Check it out! Pink dolphins! Even better than pink sharks!" She frowned when they all started glaring at her. "What?"

After a while, Raspberry turned to the others and cried, "Come on, guys! Pink dolphins! How many ponies have the opportunity to get a cutie mark for *this* ?"

The magenta filly leapt into the air, tucked her legs in and screamed, "Cannonball!"

As she splashed into the water, Prism and Blueberry looked at each other and shrugged.

"Cutie Mark Crusader Dolphin Riders!" they shouted as they dove in after Raspberry.

"But I can't swim!" Gemstone reminded them.

Prism came up from the water with a smirk. "Well, it's time you learned!"

The unicorn yelped as the pegasus grabbed her leg and pulled her in.

"That was fun!" Raspberry exclaimed an hour later.

The five of them were in the bathroom, drying themselves off.

"But that wasn't very nice, pulling me into the water like that," Gemstone said, darting her eyes at Prism.

"Hey," the pegasus shrugged. "You learned to swim, didn't you?"

"And we rode on pink dolphins!" Cherry chimed. "Pink dolphins!"

"Do you think we got our cutie marks?" Blueberry wondered.

They all glanced at their flanks and frowned.

"Well, at least it wasn't a waste of time," Prism said. "Now, on to the next adventure!"

The fillies put down the fluffy towels and followed the pegasus outside.

"Whose turn is it to pick the door?"

"Me!" Raspberry piped as she bounced down the hallway. "What to choose, what to choose? Ooh! This one matches my coat!"

She opened the magenta door and revealed a small room with blank walls. All the room contained were five peculiar metal helmets sitting in a circle. The Crusaders picked them up and studied them curiously.

"What do you suppose these are for?" Gemstone inquired.

"I guess the only way we'll find out," Blueberry concluded, "is if we put them on."

Prism and Cherry shrugged and lifted the helmets above their heads.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Raspberry said as she hesitantly followed their example.

"They're just helmets, Rasp," Prism assured her. "Besides, you picked this room. We have to work with whatever's in here."

"What are these black things hanging over our eyes for?" Gemstone asked, pointing to the tinted screens covering their eyes as they put the headgear on.

The fillies gasped as the scene shifted and they were no longer in the white room. Instead, they were in a dark forest with tall trees. They glanced down and realized that each of them was holding a flashlight.

"What in the world?" Gemstone uttered.

"Look!" Cherry exclaimed, pointing in the middle of their circle.

A series of words written in white block letters appeared before them, floating in mid-air.

"What do they say?" Gemstone asked Prism.

" *Collect all 8 pages* ," the pegasus replied.

"Ooh!" Blueberry piped. "This must be a game of some sort!"

"I *love* games!" Cherry chimed.

"Me too!" Raspberry declared.

"Me three!" Blueberry agreed. "Let's split up and find those pages!"

"Cute Mark Crusader Page Finders!" the triplets said together.

"Wait!" Gemstone insisted as the Tri-Pies bounced off in opposite

directions. "Do you really think we should split up in these…?"

"Don't worry, Gem," Prism said, putting a hoof around her. "I'll stay with ya."

"Hey, you guys!" Raspberry's voice called from afar. "I think I found one! It's stuck right on this tree!"

"What's it say? What's it say?" Blueberry's and Cherry's voices shouted simultaneously.

"It says: *Don't look, or it…takes you.* " There was silence. "I don't like the sound of that, girls!"

More text appeared before Prism's and Gemstone's eyes. Prism read it aloud for her friend:

" *Pages 1/8.* "

The unicorn yelped as she heard a loud booming sound in the distance.

"Does any pony else hear that scary drum?" she shivered.

"Uh…" Prism uttered. "It's probably just one of the Tri-Pies' hoof steps or something. Come on. The sooner we get those pages, the sooner we can get out of here."

Raspberry's fear returned to her the minute she started hearing the thumps. They were slow, but they seemed to be getting closer. She glanced back at the note in her hoof. The writing made her uncomfortable. What did it mean? Don't look at what? What would take you?

She stopped when the light from her torch flickered across a large rock. Taped to that rock was another piece of paper. Smiling, Raspberry trotted up to it and squinted so she could make out the message in the dim light: *Can't run.*

She shivered. "I'm *really* not liking this game."

She took the note and the first one and put them both in her mane with her flashlight. The words *Pages 2/8* appeared before her eyes. She gasped as the thumping became faster, and she had the strange feeling that someone was behind her. She turned her head and saw that her instinct was correct.

Raspberry's pupils shrunk to the size of peas as they beheld the creature before her. She then followed her next instinct: to run.

It had only been a glimpse, but she had seen enough of that creature to know he was bad news. She had seen a tall, thin pony in a black suit and tie, but he had no face. It was all white, with no mouth, no eyes, no nose, just a blank face!

She slowed down a moment as another thought occurred to her. "Maybe he's friendly!"

She turned around and saw that despite the distance she had made between them, the pony had gotten closer and she could've sworn she heard a chord of frightening music.

"Not friendly!" she screamed as she made another break for it.

She kept glancing over her shoulder, but the thing kept getting closer and closer. He wasn't even running. He would just appear, standing still, waiting to just appear again.

Raspberry remembered the messages, and would've gulped had she not been panting from running. Why was she panting? She didn't usually get this tired from running.

"It said 'Don't look.' Maybe if I close my eyes, it'll go away!"

Raspberry stopped and shut her eyes tight. "Go away, go away, go away, go away…"

She didn't know whether or not it had worked. She could still hear the drum. Curious, she opened one eye and then the other.

The last thing she heard was an ear-piercing scream. And the last thing that she saw was a blank, white face.

Blueberry was examining an old abandoned vehicle.

"What kind of carriage is this?" she asked herself. "Aha!"

She grinned when she saw a piece of paper taped to the side of it. Immediately after she touched it, *Pages 3/8* appeared before her. She held her flashlight to the note and tilted her head at what it read. On it was a rough sketch of a tall pony in a suit, standing beside a tree. Written diagonally along the side was one word: *Follows* .

"Strange."

She jumped in her skin as the mysterious drum in the distance played faster. It seemed to be doing that every time a new page was found. She had seen the message indicating that one of the others had found the second. She wondered what that one had said.

The white text appeared again, telling her that the fourth had been found.

"I wish I knew what they said. 'Don't look or it takes you' and 'Follows.' It must be talking about this strange pony in the drawing. Hmm. If this is indeed some game Uncle Discord created, it must have an obstacle of some sort. Finding a bunch of notes with nothing stopping you seems too easy a task. And what would we do after we find all eight pages? Do they unlock some secret code or something? Or will we meet this strange…?"

Blueberry lost her train of thought as her vision went blurry. She felt something tap her shoulder and turned around to see the pony in the drawing.

"Oh."

Cherry was bouncing through the wood, thrilled that she had made a new friend. She had met him after finding that weird drawing. He never seemed to move, only when she wasn't looking, so she decided to make a game out of it.

She turned around and shouted, "Green light!"

The faceless pony stood still. She turned back.

"Red light! Green light! Red light! Green light!"

On the last green light, he moved from his spot and teleported right in front of her. Cherry growled as her vision blurred.

"Hey, that's cheating!"

Prism and Gemstone walked slowly through the rows of oil tanks, both of them shivering in fright.

"I'm *really* not enjoying this, Prism," the unicorn gulped. "I mean… those last three notes we found: 'Help me,' 'Leave me alone,' 'Always watches; no eyes?' And that drum keeps beating louder and faster! And where are the Tri-Pies? Oh, shoot! Now my flashlight's dimming! I wanna go home!"

"Everything will be fine, Gem," Prism said unsurely. "I mean…it's not like we're in the Everfree Forest or anything. They're just regular old woods. Nothing can hurt us out here."

Gemstone glanced behind her shoulder and her face turned paler than usual. "Um…Prism?"

"What?"

"Who…who's that?"

Prism followed her gaze and screamed at the sight of a faceless pony standing a few feet behind them. In a split second, he was a foot closer. The fillies shrieked again and took off.

"What do we do?!" Gemstone cried.

"Quick! Into that building over there!"

As they approached it, the unicorn glanced behind them. "He's

getting closer!"

"We'll lose him in there!"

They ran into a narrow hallway with tiled floors.

"What is this?" Gemstone inquired. "Some kind of bathroom?"

The faceless pony appeared in front of them. The fillies screamed as they stopped in their tracks.

"This way!" Prism shouted, pulling her friend around a corner.

But they reached a dead end, and the monster was right behind them.

"I'll distract him!" Prism insisted. "You find a way out!"

"But…"

"Just go!"

The pegasus jumped back into the hallway. "Hey, No Face! Think it might be possible for some pony to give you a black eye?"

The stranger responded by teleporting closer. Prism ran out the way she and Gemstone came and the faceless pony disappeared to go after her. Seeing that the hallway was empty, the unicorn rushed out and looked around. She flinched when she heard a scream and felt like crying. She turned another corner and gasped when she saw the last note taped to the wall.

She picked it up and white text appeared. She couldn't exactly read it, but she assumed it said all pages were collected. She then squinted at the last note. The pony that had been chasing them was drawn on there and surrounding him was a two-letter word, written over and over again. Gemstone frowned as she tried to make it out.

" *M-mo* ? *Mo* ? Oh! *No* ! That must be it!"

Her excitement was short-lived. Now that all the pages were found, what did she do now? Had the last white text contained new

instructions? She cursed her dyslexia for the hundredth time.

"Well, I hope Prism knows…"

She stopped as she turned around and saw the faceless pony right in front of her. This time, four black tentacles were wiggling on his back. Before she could scream, his blank face was only an inch away and everything went black.

Every filly gasped when the words "Game Over" appeared before their eyes. The screens turned off and they found themselves back in the white room.

"That was a video game?" Prism said, removing her helmet.

"But…" Gemstone uttered, doing the same. "It seemed so…real."

"Remind me to commend Uncle Discord on his digital graphics," Blueberry said.

"That was fun!" Cherry chimed. "Though that Slendy's a dirty cheater!"

They all stared at her and said, "Slendy?"

"That's what I call him! You know, because he's so tall and slender?"

"That was scary!" Raspberry exclaimed.

"Absolutely frightful!" Gemstone shouted. "Let's never do a thing like that again!"

"Yeah," Prism agreed, tossing her helmet away as if it were on fire. "Well, it's my turn. Hopefully whatever's behind the next door won't be as…terrifying. You know, for *you* guys."

Gemstone and Raspberry nodded as they followed the pegasus out.

"I don't know what you guys are talking about," said Cherry. "I think that Slendy is just misunderstood!"

"It certainly was an intriguing game," Blueberry declared. "I really would've liked to know more about that Slendy or whatever you call it. How'd his face get to be like that anyway?"

"Yeah! And why doesn't he understand the rules of Red Light, Green Light?"

"I don't care who he is!" Raspberry insisted. "He's scary! And I don't like him!"

"I'm with you there," Gemstone mumbled. "Prism, please pick a nice door?"

"Sure," Prism grumbled. "Like I have any idea what's behind which door!"

She opened a random door without even looking at it. She jumped back when a manticore roared in her face. Blueberry gasped, Raspberry nearly had a heart attack and Gemstone fainted into Blueberry's hooves.

Cherry shoved Prism aside, holding out a stool and whip.

"Back, back, back!" she cried, cracking the whip.

The manticore growled, but recoiled back into the room. Cherry shut the door when he was all the way inside. She turned and grinned to the others who were all staring at her in awe.

"How…?" Prism started to say.

"Cutie Mark Crusader Manticore Tamers!" Cherry said with a bow. "Thank you very much, fillies and fillies! You've been a wonderful audience!"

She glanced at her flank and pouted. "Oh, man! That would've been a great cutie mark!"

"So much for a *nice* door," Gemstone sighed as she fanned herself with her hoof.

"Looks like it's my turn!" Blueberry said cheerfully.

"Hey, no fair!" Prism insisted. "My turn only lasted like five seconds!"

"Sorry, but we agreed, one door per pony! And, since I think we've had enough thrills for one day, I'll find one that's safe and not frightening."

"How are you going to do that?" Gemstone inquired.

Blueberry went to one door and pressed her ear against it. "Hmm. Vampire fruit bats. Nope." She went to the next door and did the same. "Orthros, commonly known as a two-headed dog. Nope." She continued along the row of doors. "Laser eye surgery room for cockatrices. Nope. Milking room for vipers. Nope. Gee, Aunt Fluttershy certainly has a lot of pets. Ooh! Talking bananas!"

"That counts as scary," Prism cringed.

"Okay. Ah! Do you guys like roller coasters?"

Prism and the other two triplets cheered in agreement.

"Actually," Gemstone replied, staring at her hooves, "I've never been on a roller coaster."

Cherry looked at her wearily. "You *really* need to get out more, Gem."

"It's not scary, is it?"

Blueberry pressed her ear to the door again. "Hmm. Can't tell. Wanna risk it?"

Before Gemstone could reply, Blueberry opened the door. Sitting there was a black coaster car with three benches, each long enough to hold three ponies. Beyond the car was nothing but darkness, and this made Gemstone gulp.

"You sure?"

"Positive," Blueberry replied, knocking on the metal car. "From what I can tell, it's perfectly safe. It's got seatbelts, plus safety bars for extra precaution, and it's secured tightly to the rail. Oh, and look!"

Near the doorway was a sign with an arrow that said: *You must be this tall to ride.* "We're just the right height! We'll be fine. I call shotgun!"

"Me too!" Raspberry piped, jumping into the front with Blueberry.

"Me three!" Cherry chimed, joining her sisters.

"Me not," Gemstone murmured.

"Chillax," Prism said, taking her friend's hoof and leading her to the bench behind the triplets. "I'll be right by your side the entire ride."

Gemstone was still nervous as the pegasus fastened her seatbelt for her. When they were all fastened in, the door slammed behind them, leaving them in darkness.

" *Welcome, foolish mortals* ," said a deep voice. " *Please remain seated and keep your hooves and tails inside the car at all times.* "

The safety bars lowered onto their laps. Gemstone gripped hers in fright.

"I don't know about this…"

" *Sit back and relax as we take you through a journey of time and space and gumdrops. We hope that you have a pleasant ride, for it may be your last!* "

Gemstone shivered as the voice cackled evilly and the car slowly moved forward.

"He's joking, Gem," Prism assured her. "It's just a ride."

"Hey, Blue," Raspberry said, turning to her sister, "how fast do you suppose this thing's going to go?"

"Well," Blueberry said, tapping her chin. "If my theory is correct, we should be going…"

She was cut off as the car made a sudden drop and the five of them screamed on instinct. They fell so fast, they felt as if their faces were

falling off.

"I'd say about a hundred and fifty miles per hour!" Blueberry shouted.

"Awesome!" Prism cried.

"Whee!" the triplets cheered, putting their hooves in the air.

"HELP!" Gemstone screeched as she shut her eyes tight.

They all screamed again as they looped around and zoomed up an incline before dropping again. Then the ride suddenly slowed down and Gemstone opened her eyes to see what had caused it to do so. Cheerful music filled the air and the fillies found themselves surrounded by dancing animatronic ponies, dressed in clothing from around the world.

"Wha…?" Prism started to say.

"Nice music!" Cherry chimed.

"Mmm-hmm!" her sisters nodded in agreement.

Gemstone smiled. "It *is* rather catchy."

Prism groaned. "It's getting on my nerves."

They screamed in surprise as they dropped again, though this fall wasn't as steep as the first. This was followed by several twists and turns. Various images popped out of thin air: a floating candelabrum, angry pirates, the planet Saturn, a yeti that would've made Gemstone jump out of her seat had she not been strapped in, a clock striking thirteen and a pair of glowing red eyes.

The ride made another drop, but this one ended with a splash.

"Cool!" Blueberry exclaimed. "I didn't know this was a water ride too!"

Prism and Gemstone stiffened when they heard music again, only this was slower and…romantic. The walls lit up with pink, red and

white hearts floating everywhere.

"Awwwww!" the triplets said in unison.

The two fillies behind them glanced at each other.

"This is awkward," Prism muttered.

Fortunately, that awkwardness didn't last long when the car suddenly shot upwards and moved into another loop before going down again. The fillies were still screaming when it came to an immediate halt.

They went silent as the safety bars lifted from their laps and a door opened, letting light into the room.

" *Thank you for riding with us today* ," said the voice. " *Please exit on your left and slowly make your way towards the exit. Remember, the Castle of Chaos it not responsible for any lost or stolen items.* "

The fillies remained frozen in their seats.

"What…just happened?" Prism asked.

Gemstone chuckled hesitantly. "You know? That was sort of fun."

"Too bad the ride is over though," Cherry said as she unbuckled her seatbelt. "Well, at least it's my turn to pick the door now! Come on!"

The others followed her out the door and were surprised to find themselves in a completely different hallway.

"I think we're on the top floor now," Blueberry observed, "but I could've sworn we were going down most of the time."

Raspberry shook her head. "It's the Castle of Chaos. Don't question it."

"Guys, look!" Cherry chimed, pointing to a polka-dotted door. "This one looks fun!"

But her face fell as soon as she saw what was inside. The room was

filled with nothing but pillows of all shapes, sizes and colors.

"Rats," she muttered. "I was hoping it would be something more exciting." Then she grinned. "Oh well! Only one thing to do now!"

She leapt into the air and spread out her legs, shouting, "Cherry Bomb!"

She landed in the pile of softness and laughed as she started tossing pillows around. The others did not object as they jumped in with her.

"Finally!" Gemstone cried. "Something that won't hurt us!"

The five friends then engaged in the ultimate pillow fight, building themselves forts and tossing pillows the size of beds. They played in that room for what felt like hours, until Fluttershy appeared in the doorway and said:

"Girls, your mommies are here to pick you up. Scootaloo's here too."

"Awwww!" the fillies sighed simultaneously.

"But we're having so much fun!" Raspberry complained.

"Sorry, girls," Fluttershy said sweetly, "but it's nearly dinnertime and you must get home."

The girls hung their heads as they walked out of the pillow room and followed Fluttershy downstairs.

"But there were so many rooms we hadn't even seen yet!" Cherry whined.

"Oh well," Prism sighed. "At least we'll have a lot more to explore next time we visit!"

"Yeah!" the triplets cheered in agreement.

"Though next time," Gemstone said, "let's not pick anything scary."

They all laughed as they recalled everything they did that day.

Indeed, there was no place more fun than the Castle of Chaos.

Neither of them realized that for once, they did not check their flanks for cutie marks. It was probably a good thing, because that would've put a damper on their exciting day together.

So this turned into a fun little adventure with all five Crusaders, though it turned out longer than I thought. I'm finding it easier to write each filly, now that I'm getting a better idea of what their cutie marks are going to be (even I didn't know at first!).

I hope I didn't make it too scary with the Slenderman reference. I just thought how about they stumble upon a virtual reality room? *Slender* was the first game I could think of. The "Red Light, Green Light" idea was from one of the Let's Play videos I watched.

That ride was pretty much a mush of every ride I could think of (most of them Disneyland rides).

Doesn't really match up with the theme of the first two days, but it was still fun to write!

Weddings

I feel like most of these one-shots are experimental, because they vary from crazy adventures to mysteries to fluff pieces. I didn't think I would finish this chapter so quickly, but then again it wasn't meant to be a long one.

Prism sat and watched in agony as Princess Celestia made her speech. She shifted uncomfortably in her itchy purple dress.

"Dad," she whispered. "When can I take this stupid dress off?"

"Shush!" Gemstone whispered harshly.

Prism scowled as she glanced over at the Tri-Pies who were standing on the side of the aisle, wearing flowery color-coordinated dressed and carrying baskets. Prism was actually glad she wasn't a flower girl, because she would've looked even more ridiculous in one of those outfits.

She looked up at her mother who was lined up with the other bridesmaids. She did not understand how her mother, Co-Captain of the Wonderbolts, could put up with this torture!

"Dad, how much longer is this going to take?"

This time, her father, the twins, as well as her best friend shushed her.

"But it's going on forever!"

"Hush up!" Gemstone hissed. "She's getting to the good part!"

"Do you," Celestia said, turning to the bride, "Princess Twilight Sparkle, take this stallion to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?"

Twilight was dressed in a long, flowing white gown, hemmed with

purple rhinestones, courtesy of Rarity, of course. She smiled at the stallion standing across from her and replied:

"I do."

"And do you," Celestia said to the groom, "Flash Sentry, take this mare to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?"

The orange pegasus with the wild blue mane did not even hesitate. "I do."

"May I have the rings, please?"

Applespike giggled as Spike held him and the pillow with the rings up. Celestia used her magic to place one ring on Twilight's horn and the larger one around Flash's hoof. Ponies without horns had the choice of wearing their wedding rings around their necks or hooves and Flash had chosen the latter.

"By the power vested in me," Celestia announced, "I now pronounce you mare and colt. You may now kiss the bride."

Flash raised his hoof to Twilight's face and gently pulled her in for a soft, but passionate kiss on the lips. The ponies stomped and clapped their hooves in applause, while Prism sighed in relief.

"Finally!"

At the reception, ponies gathered in the garden and watched as the bride and groom had their first dance together, the CMC band playing their song. Soarin put his hoof around Rainbow Dash and smiled.

"It's nice to have a wedding without any disasters," he said.

Rainbow frowned and looked at her husband. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well, there was Princess Cadence's wedding twenty years ago. I

think a changeling invasion counts as a disaster. Then there was Discord and Fluttershy's wedding. I mean, wasn't she almost forced to marry him or something? Then there was our wedding…"

His wife crossed her hooves. "How was *our* wedding a disaster?"

"Well, it almost didn't happen."

The Dash children gasped as they stared at their parents.

"What happened?" Lightning asked.

"It was nothing," Rainbow insisted. "I just…got cold hooves for a moment."

"A moment?" Soarin said, putting his hooves on his hips. "The night before our wedding, you went into hysterics!" He rubbed his temple. "I can still feel that ironing board!"

The twins snickered.

"Mom hit you with an ironing board?" Thunder chuckled.

"Yeah, and threatened to draw up divorce papers if we didn't call off the wedding right then! I refused, and then she picked up the cedar chest…"

"Okay, okay, they get it!" Rainbow shouted. "Look, it doesn't matter how worked up I was about our wedding. I went through with it, didn't I?"

"What made you change your mind?" Prism inquired.

Rainbow chuckled as she nuzzled Soarin's neck. "He did his chopstick nose trick to cheer me up. Only he didn't have chopsticks, so he used pencils but got them too far up his nose."

The Dash siblings looked at each other in confusion. "Huh?"

"Well, he needed *some pony* to get those pencils out of his nose. Then I remembered all those times I had to save his behind and realized that if I didn't marry him, he would hurt himself." She

scoffed. "Besides, it was hilarious."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the garden, the Tri-Pies were watching the romantic scene with their parents. The three of them let out a collected sigh.

"Mom, Dad," Raspberry piped, "what was *your* wedding like?"

"Oh boy, where do we begin?" Cheese Sandwich (who had dyed his hair back to brunette) replied. "Well, it was the biggest bash of the year!"

"Of the *century* !" Pinkie Pie corrected.

"Of the *millennium* !"

"The biggest, greatest, most super-duper awesome epic party Equestria had ever seen!"

Cheese put his hoof around his wife. "And we planned it together!"

Pinkie did the same to her husband. "The Super-Duper Party Ponies!"

"But you were still pretending to be Red Shoes, weren't you?" Blueberry inquired. "So on the marriage contract did you sign that name or your real name? Because wouldn't it be invalid or something if you used a fake name?"

Their father laughed. "Don't worry. We thought about that. When we were signing the thing, we shouted, 'Hey, look! A moose!' I signed my real name while every pony was looking away."

"Well, that's good!" Cherry chimed. "Imagine what would've happened if you weren't legally married! Why, we might not have been born!"

Blueberry nudged her sister in the side. "Don't you remember? Mom was pregnant with us before they got married."

"I still don't know how that happened," Raspberry said, scratching her head.

Their parents looked at each other nervously.

"Um…" they uttered.

"When a mare and stallion fall in love…" Cheese Sandwich began.

"And they get…really, really, *really* close…" Pinkie continued.

"The stork comes and…"

"Gives them a magic bean…"

"And the girl swallows it and…"

"It turns into a baby!"

"Yeah! And, uh…the stork gave us three beans!"

"And that's how you girls were born!"

The Tri-Pies grinned in satisfaction.

"Oh," Raspberry piped. "Well that makes sense."

The song ended and ponies stomped their hooves. Applebloom then stepped up to the microphone.

"Mares and gentlecolts, the bride will now be dancing with her father. Dads and fillies, you're welcome to join them!"

The Tri-Pies brightened up and each grabbed one of Cheese Sandwich's hooves. "Come on, Dad! Come on, Dad! Come on, Dad!"

"Okay, okay!" their father exclaimed. "Let's just get a little organized. Raspberry, climb on my back. Cherry, get on my head. Blueberry, you take my hooves. When I say the word, you switch."

The triplets cheered at the idea and got into their positions. All around them, fathers were taking their daughters onto the dance floor. Soarin danced in a circle with Prism and Lightning, Discord twirled Screwball around, Spike lifted Cinnamon Roll into the air and Fancy Pants and Gemstone slowly swayed together, as Gemstone

wasn't much for dancing.

"I like weddings, Daddy," the unicorn filly said with a smile. "They're so romantic."

"Indeed," Fancy Pants replied, running his hoof through his little girl's mane.

"Was yours and Mum's wedding just as magical?"

He blushed. "Well…let's just say that the minute after I proposed, your mother showed me that she had everything planned from the guest list to the bridesmaids' gowns. We didn't have to hire a wedding planner with your mother in charge. In fact, it only took about two weeks to get it together."

"Did you have it here in Canterlot?"

"Yes, but not inside. We were married right in this garden. We thought it appropriate, since this was where I met her friends and discovered that she was more interesting than I had thought."

"How *did* you and Mummy meet anyway?"

"We sort of…bumped into each other." He chuckled. "On the streets of Canterlot. She had so many shopping bags, she didn't see me."

"Was it love at first sight?"

"Not exactly. See, I was with another mare then, but I was intrigued by your mother. She's quite the mare, you know. Strong, independent, generous, and, of course, very pretty." He lifted her chin. "Like you."

Gemstone beamed and nuzzled her father's chest.

When the dance ended, it was the groom's turn to dance with his mother and all the mothers and sons were invited to join them. Fluttershy picked up Zany from his carriage and nuzzled him affectionately before flying him out. Rainbow ruffled Thunder's mane as she took his hoof. Applejack carried Applespike in the crook of her foreleg as her adopted son Cinnamon Stick led them both onto

the dance floor.

The triplets walked up to Spike and Cinnamon Roll.

"Hey, Uncle Spike!" Raspberry exclaimed. "We were wondering: what was your marriage to Auntie Applejack like?"

The dragon's face turned red. "Um…well…"

"I'd like to hear that story too," his adopted daughter said. "I don't think ya ever told me about yerr wedding."

"Uh…well…we had it at Sweet Apple Acres and…nothing really interesting happened…"

"Aw, he's leavin' out all the good stuff!"

Spike winced as old Granny Smith came up and playfully slapped him on the back. "Lil' Spike here had feet as cold as the first Hearth's Warming, but we gave him a strong talkin'."

"You gave me more than just a 'strong talking,'" Spike murmured.

He could still see it all: Big Macintosh and Applebloom pulling on his legs, his claws gripping to the doorway of Big Mac's bedroom which he had been using as his dressing room.

"Come on, Spike!" Applebloom had cried. "You're not leavin' my sister at the altar!"

"Eeyup!" Big Mac had grunted.

"I can't do it!" Spike had screamed. "I'm too young!"

"You're eighteen! You're old enough!"

"Eeyup!"

"Don't ya love my sister?!"

"I do!" the dragon had argued. "But I can't marry her! Not now! I'm not ready!"

"But the whole family's out there waitin'!"

"I can't do it! And you can't make me!"

"Wanna bet?"

Spike still shivered at the memory of Applejack's beautiful but stunned face, and everyone else's faces, as she stared at him and what Big Mac had pointed at his back.

"Um…" Twilight, who was performing the ceremony, had uttered. "Mares and gentlecolts, we are gathered here…"

"I do, I do, okay?!" Spike had shouted frantically. "I do!"

"Big Mac!" Applejack had exclaimed. "Put that pitchfork away!"

"What they do?"

Spike shook out of his flashback to answer Cinnamon Roll's question.

"Let's just say they gave me a *really* strong talking."

Half an hour later, ponies had free reign of the dance floor and the young Cutie Mark Crusaders met up to relate the stories they had heard from their parents.

"Your Mom and Dad have a weird relationship," Cherry told Prism.

The pegasus filly shrugged. "Grown-ups do the strangest things."

"Uncle Spike and Auntie Applejack's wedding sounded strange," said Raspberry. "He wouldn't really tell us what happened."

"What do you suppose our weddings will be like when we get married?" Gemstone questioned.

"We've got it all planned out," Cherry said, putting her hooves around her sisters. "The three of us are going to get married together!"

"Triple wedding!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"We are?" Raspberry asked nervously.

"Preferably with boy triplets!"

Cherry frowned. "Who said they had to be boys?"

They all stared at her.

"What? I'm just saying we should keep our options open. Besides, who knows who we'll like in ten years?"

"I'm going to have my wedding out here in the garden," Gemstone declared, "just like my parents did. What do you think, Prism? Prism?"

The pegasus was too lost in a fantasy to hear her. She imagined herself standing on a cloud with Kicks, Princess Twilight standing in front of them.

"Do you, Prism, take Kicks to be your husband?"

"As long as he can keep up."

She strapped on a helmet and hopped onto a rocket-powered skateboard. Kicks leapt into her hooves and they zoomed off into the sunset.

"Prism?" Gemstone called, waving her hoof over her friend's eyes. "Prism!"

"Huh?" the pegasus said, snapping out of her trance.

"What do you think your wedding will be like?" Raspberry repeated.

Prism blushed. "I think…I think we should wait until we're older."

Took me this long to write about Flash Sentry and Twilight getting married (I like this ship, deal with it), and it turned out to be a series of flashbacks/recollections from many other

couples.

Applejack and Spike's wedding was going to involve shotguns, but then I thought: do they even have those in Equestria? I hope no one takes offense by that, it was meant to be humorous. Interesting fact: one of my parents' wedding pictures is made to look like a shotgun wedding (Grandpa had brought a be-be gun).

I also hope everyone was able to keep track of all the OC's in here.

I might take a break from these CMC stories. I started them as something to do while I was stuck on bigger fics, and now I have an idea for one involving Twilight Sparkle that I really want to get started on, so if I don't update on this for a while, you'll know why.

Until We Meet Again

The last few chapters were humorous. This one's more serious.

Prism yawned as she arose from her slumber. She smiled when she saw Tank's shell at the foot of her bed, his head and feet tucked in as he slept. She rubbed the top of the shell affectionately before climbing out of bed and trotting over to the calendar. She picked up the red marker with her mouth and crossed off yesterday.

Then she dropped the pen as her jaw dropped. Written on today's date was *Prism-10* .

"Yes!" she exclaimed, her tiny wings fluttering. "It's my birthday!"

Tank popped his head out of his shell to see what the commotion was. He tilted his head in confusion when he saw his young owner dancing around the room, chanting:

"It's my birthday! It's my birthday! It's my birthday!"

She paused and gasped. "Which means…"

The filly immediately raced downstairs. Finding no pony in the kitchen, she continued on to the living room. Scootaloo welcomed her with open hooves.

"There's the birthday…"

But Prism ran past her aunt and to her siblings who were looking out the window.

"Are they here yet? Are they here yet? Are they here yet?"

Lightning turned to her sister and chuckled. "Calm down, squirt. No, they're not here yet, but they should be here soon." She sat down and gave her sister a squeeze. "Happy Birthday, sis."

Prism looked past her sister. "Are they here yet?"

Thunder shook his head. "Nope. Not yet."

"Okay." The filly paused. "How about now?"

Her brother sighed. "No."

She tapped her hoof and glanced at the clock on the wall.

"They here now?"

"No!" Thunder snapped, giving her a frustrated look. "Stop asking!"

Prism hung her head. "Sorry. It's just that we haven't seen Mom or Dad since Aunt Twilight's wedding, and that was a month ago. They said they'd be here."

"You can chill, squirt," Lightning assured her. "They haven't missed your birthday yet."

"They missed ours though," Thunder grumbled.

She shot her brother a glare. "You're not helping!"

"Yeah, yeah." He gasped suddenly and pulled the curtain over the window. "They're here!"

The girls squealed excitedly.

"Positions, every pony!" Scootaloo announced, ducking behind the couch.

"Okay," Lightning whispered to Prism, leading her into the kitchen. "Remember, just like we practiced."

"Roger," the filly giggled.

She hid behind the doorway and grinned in delight. She couldn't wait to see the looks on her parents' faces once they saw the surprise.

There was a knock at the door and Lightning joined Scootaloo behind the couch. She signaled to her brother standing beside the

door. He opened it so he would be concealed behind it.

"Happy Birth…day?"

Rainbow Dash and Soarin trailed off when they noticed the room empty. The mare shook her head with a chuckle.

"They're doing it again." She went along with it. "Oh, goodness! There's no pony here!"

"You don't think they forgot we were coming, did you?" Soarin shouted, winking at his wife.

"Oh where, oh where could our kids be?"

"Here I am!" Prism announced.

The couple gasped when they saw their youngest daughter fluttering out of the kitchen. She was hovering at least two inches above the ground and coming toward them fast.

"Guys, look how high I can fly now!" the filly piped.

Soarin and Rainbow laughed as they knelt down and opened their forelegs. Prism flew into them and embraced both her parents. The others then came out of their hiding places and yelled:

"Surprise!"

"Well, look at you!" Rainbow laughed, ruffling her daughter's mane. "Some pony's been practicing."

"We've been helping her," Lightning explained.

Their mother raised an eyebrow. " *You two* have been teaching your sister to fly? Man, this morning's just full of surprises!"

"Oh!" Soarin squealed as he squeezed his daughter. "My little girl is getting so big!" He looked at her sternly. "Stop it, okay? That's an order!"

Prism giggled. "But Dad, how am I gonna fly then?"

"You won't! You'll just have me to carry you for the rest of your life!"

"Quit smothering her, Soarin," Rainbow chuckled. "She's not a baby."

The mare stood up to hug the twins. "It's great to see my kids again." She looked at them questioningly. "Seriously though, what happened while we were gone that you two are suddenly so nice to Prism?"

Thunder and Lightning glanced at each other nervously and blushed as they recalled how they had accidentally turned into babies and Prism had to take care of them.

"Anyway," Rainbow said, "we have a little surprise for you too." She turned to the open doorway. "Come on in, Dad!"

The children gasped when a light blue pegasus with light brown eyes and a rainbow mane with streaks of gray appeared in the doorway.

"Grandpa Rainbow!" they shouted in unison.

"Hey, you little rainbow rascals!" the aged stallion greeted as his three grandchildren rushed to embrace him. "Let me have a look at ya. Thunder, you've become a strapping young stallion. You must be real popular with the ladies, huh?"

"I actually have a girlfriend," Thunder said proudly. "I can't wait for you to meet her, Grandpa. She's amazing!"

"I'll bet she is! Lightning, how ya doing with the boys?"

Lightning blushed. "Well, I'm not seeing any pony right now, but did you know Screwball, Thunder and I made the Junior League? I'm playing left field, Thunder's right field and Screwball's the pitcher."

"I can't wait to see ya play. And you, Miss Birthday Girl…" He picked up Prism. "You're looking more like your mother every day! How old are you now? Seven?"

"I'm ten years old, Grandpa!" Prism giggled.

"Ten?! My, how time flies! Seems like only yesterday you were sleeping with the other newborn foals in the hospital. Oh, that reminds me. I got you a birthday present."

Once Grandpa Rainbow had set her down, Prism jumped up excitedly. "What is it? What is it?"

The old stallion laughed as he reached into his saddlebag and pulled out his gift. "Happy Birthday, sweetie."

"A pith helmet!" Prism exclaimed, placing it on her head. "Just like Daring Do's!"

"Now don't think I didn't get anything for you two," Grandpa Rainbow said to the twins as he dug further into his bag.

He pulled out two baseball mitts, a black one for Thunder and a yellow for Lightning.

"Since I heard you were trying out for the Junior League, I thought you might need these," their grandpa explained.

"Thanks, Grandpa Rainbow!" the Dash children said, hugging the old stallion again.

Prism pulled away first and looked at her parents hopefully. "You have presents for me too?"

"Whoa, hon!" Soarin laughed. "You'll get the rest of your presents at the party this afternoon. Right now, let's have some breakfast."

"Buttermilk pancakes with zap apple jam?" the birthday filly pleaded.

"That we saved just for the occasion!" her father called as he flew into the kitchen. "Just give me a few minutes!"

"Sure you don't want any help, Soarin?" Rainbow Dash shouted.

"No, thanks! I don't like burnt pancakes!"

"I was just kidding! We all know I'm a terrible cook!" She wrapped her wing around Prism. "While Daddy's making breakfast, how about

we put those strong wings to the test?"

"Okay!" the filly replied, her wings fluttering excitedly. "You know, it's been a while since we flew together."

Rainbow sighed. "Yeah, it has." She shouted over her shoulder. "We'll be back soon!"

"Roger!" Soarin called from the kitchen.

"Scootaloo, keep him and Dad out of trouble."

"Don't worry," Scootaloo smirked. "I've got everything under control."

When mother and daughter flew outside, a wave of sadness passed over the room.

"It sure is great to see them," Thunder grumbled.

"Yeah," Lightning sighed.

Grandpa Rainbow left the living room to talk to his son-in-law. He was getting eggs out of the refrigerator.

"Have you told them yet?"

Soarin froze at the old pegasus' question. It took him a while to reply.

"The twins and Scootaloo know."

His father-in-law looked at him seriously. "Does Prism know?"

The younger stallion bit his lip. "It's her birthday. Let's not put a damper on it."

Grandpa Rainbow shook his head with a sigh. "You can't keep this a secret from her forever. She needs to be prepared for something like this."

"I know." The rest Soarin muttered under his breath. "I just don't know how we're gonna break it to her."

"So what do you remember about that flight?" Rainbow Dash asked her daughter as they rested on a cloud.

Even though Prism couldn't fly on her own yet, Rainbow was training her to be aware of everything around her while flying, so she could avoid obstacles in the air and watch out for signs of trouble on the ground.

"Well," Prism said, tapping her chin in thought. "I remember Derpy was delivering the morning mail, but I guess she messed it up again, because she went to the same mailbox twice. I also saw Aunt Applejack and Cinnamon Roll setting up their apple stand. Oh, yeah! And Lyra and Bon-Bon were eating donuts at the Ponyville Café!"

"Actually it was bagels, but you're getting better!" Her smile faded as she caught the light in her daughter's eye. "You really are growing up, aren't you?"

"Yup! Isn't it great?"

Rainbow nodded solemnly. "Yeah."

Her daughter's flying was really improving. During their flight, she didn't have to lift her up by the hoof. Prism had fluttered at her side rather than below her. Soon Rainbow wouldn't have to hold her hoof at all. Only a few years ago, she was holding the filly above her head as she flapped her wings, weighing next to nothing. She was too heavy now, even for Rainbow Dash, to lift that high.

It hit Rainbow Dash like a ton of bricks. Her little girl was growing up. Today she was ten years old. Soon she would be flying on her own. Soon she would get her cutie mark. Soon she would be graduating from school and then her fillyhood would be over. Soon she would get a job. Soon she would get married and have foals of her own.

Rainbow Dash felt pride as well as sorrow.

This wasn't the first time she had gone through something like this. The first was with Scootaloo. Even though she wasn't really her sister, Rainbow had felt responsible for her, teaching her how to fly,

showing her how to defend herself. Then came the day Scootaloo had gotten her cutie mark and then the day she flew for the first time without her help. Then she went off with her friends to start a band, and it was clear she didn't need Rainbow anymore.

But Scootaloo had come back when the twins were born. Rainbow remembered how scared she was when she first held the two crying foals in her hooves. She felt she wasn't cut out for parenthood, but soon she realized her experience with Scootaloo had prepared her for it (except for all the diaper changing).

It hadn't been difficult raising the twins, since they could fly at a month old. It was their fights that made the task challenging. They grew up quickly, independent as they were. They were among the first in their class to earn their cutie marks. They still had responsibility to learn, but from what she had seen this morning, Rainbow could tell they were nearly there.

It was different with Prism. She was the late bloomer, the one who needed her the most, and yet, Rainbow was just now realizing that she and Soarin had missed out on a lot of Prism's fillyhood. She had only been three years old when they became Co-Captains of the Wonderbolts and hence, had to go away most of the time. So far, they had made every one of her birthdays and Hearth's Warmings, but all that time in between had been taken.

What if she got her cutie mark and they weren't there to see it? What if she experienced her first crush and they weren't there to advise her? What if she finally flew and they weren't there to cheer her on?

How could she ever leave her again?

"You okay, Mom?" Prism questioned.

Rainbow shook out of her thoughts. "Uh, yeah." Then she smiled again. "Hey, I have an idea. How about this summer, we all go up to Winsome Falls, like we did when you were seven? We'll hike through the woods, stop for camp, roast marshmallows, tell scary stories and when we get to the falls, we'll bathe ourselves in rainbow-colored water! Sound good?"

The filly nodded enthusiastically. "That'll be fun!"

"Good. Now let's get going. Your father's sure to have breakfast ready by now."

"Mmm," Prism moaned as she wiped the rainbow-colored jam off her face. "I think those are the best pancakes you've ever made, Dad!"

"I think the aged zap apple jam might have something to do with it," Grandpa Rainbow chuckled. "Zap apple jam does taste better when aged."

"Oh, I almost forgot!"

The birthday filly raced out of the kitchen and came back later with a piece of paper in her mouth. She dropped it in her father's lap.

"I drew all six of us together!" Prism said proudly. "I would've included you, Gramps, but I didn't know you were coming."

"Aw, it's okay," her grandfather said with a laugh.

"Sweetheart, this is beautiful," Soarin said as he gazed in awe at the rather accurate drawing of their family and Scootaloo.

"Golly," Grandpa Rainbow uttered as he leaned over to peek at it. "Did you make this with those colored pencils I sent you for Hearth's Warming a few years back?"

"Uh-huh," Prism nodded. "You're gonna have to get me more though, 'cuz they're pretty small now."

"Wow," Rainbow said as she looked at the drawing over her husband's shoulder. "You're getting really good at this."

"It really is a masterpiece," Soarin said as he walked over to the refrigerator.

The thing was covered in so many drawings that he had to do a lot

of rearranging before sticking the new picture up to join them.

"You keep this up, honey," he laughed, "and we'll have to buy a bigger fridge!"

"Or at least another one!" Grandpa Rainbow added.

"That way we'll be able to stock up on enough food to feed this monster belly," Rainbow chuckled as she playfully nudged her husband's side.

"Hey!" Soarin frowned.

The whole room burst out laughing as Rainbow threw her hoof around her husband.

"It's okay, babe. I love ya anyway."

He beamed as she kissed his cheek. Soarin gazed up at Prism's many drawings on the fridge. Most of them were of members of their family. Some of them were of Daring Do, others of Prism flying and of her getting her cutie mark. Her dream cutie marks varied from lightning bolts to a Wonderbolt symbol to a rainbow.

Soarin's frown returned as he imagined the day Prism would fly and the day she would earn her cutie mark. Would they even be around for that?

He looked at his wife and could tell from her solemn expression that she was thinking the same thing.

"We have to tell her," she murmured.

He put his hoof around her and pulled her closer.

"Tomorrow," he whispered.

That afternoon at the Party Palace, all of Prism's friends, her parents' friends and the twins' friends were sitting around a long dining table wearing party hats. Prism sat at the head, in front of a

five-layered cake smothered in rainbow frosting with ten candles on top.

"Go on, Prism!" Raspberry urged. "Make a wish and blow out the candles!"

"Yeah!" Cherry chimed, licking her lips. "So we can all eat it!"

"Then we can open presents!" Gemstone clapped.

The cake was so big that Prism had to stand on her chair to reach the candles. She closed her eyes and silently made her wish. Then she opened them and blew fiercely on the tiny flames. The whole room cheered and applauded.

"What'd you wish for, sweetie?" Soarin asked.

"Yes, so I can snap my fingers and make it happen!" Discord said cheerfully.

"Do I need to tell you?" Prism replied, pointing at her wings.

The draconequus groaned and slumped back in his seat. "Not that wish again. Sorry, kiddo, but I'm forbidden to make ponies grow faster and age slower." He grinned at Fluttershy. "With the exception of my lovely wife, of course."

"That's okay. I'm actually getting close to flying!"

"It's true," Thunder declared. "This morning, she flew across the entire living room!"

"Two whole inches off the ground!" Lightning added. "Pretty soon, she'll be flying across all of Ponyville!"

Rainbow Dash and Soarin glanced at each other, both of them frowning.

"Enough chitchat!" Cherry demanded, pounding her hooves on the table. "Let's have cake!"

With so many mouths in the room (and the big mouths of the Pie

family), the cake disappeared quickly. Then it was time for Prism to open her birthday gifts. Since her parents requested that their gift be opened last, she started with her siblings. She was confused when she unwrapped a book on how to care for foals.

"In case we ever turn into babies again," Lightning whispered.

Prism couldn't help but laugh. Next was Aunt Scootaloo's gift, which was a scooter (helmet included). Then she moved on to her best friends. Gemstone gave her a beaded necklace she had made herself. Blueberry got her a magnifying glass. Raspberry gave her a sketchbook for all her drawings. Cherry got her a rubber chicken.

Eventually, Prism came to Uncle Discord's present. She was even more confused with this gift than the one from the twins. It was a hoof mirror.

"What's this for?" she asked.

"It's a magic mirror," Discord explained. "It will show you whatever you wish, as well as help you groom yourself in the morning. Your parents have one too…"

Soarin's and Rainbow Dash's eyes widened in panic.

"Discord, don't…" the latter started to say.

"…so you can communicate with them while they're in Afghanisteed!"

Prism looked up at the draconequus in shock. "What?"

Soarin winced while Rainbow Dash slowly closed her eyes and hid her face in her hooves. Their daughter slowly turned to them, her eyes glazed with fresh tears.

"You…you're going to Afghanisteed?" she uttered, her voice barely above a whisper.

Discord's smile faded once he noticed the tension between the family members. "You mean you haven't told her yet?"

He yelped as Fluttershy stepped on his dragon foot.

"Is it true?" Prism asked her parents, her eyes pleading them to say no.

The two Wonderbolts looked at each other and gave a collective sigh.

"It's true," Rainbow Dash replied.

The filly glanced around to see every pony else's reaction. No one seemed shocked, except for her friends and the babies who didn't know any better. The twins and Scootaloo were hanging their heads in shame, while Grandpa Rainbow was looking at her sadly.

Did they all know?

Prism choked on her tears as they flowed down to her lips. "Why… why didn't you tell me?"

Soarin met her eyes. "We didn't wanna spoil your birthday."

She glared at him. "Well, you did!"

She threw down the mirror and ran out the door.

"Prism, wait!" Lightning called.

She and Thunder Dash flew after her. Rainbow Dash shot a death glare at Discord and zoomed up in his face.

"What the heck is wrong with you?!" she demanded harshly.

"Me?!" Discord exclaimed.

Screwball put her hoof to her head. "You couldn't keep your mouth shut just once, huh, Dad?"

"First the whole Santa Hooves thing, now this?" Fluttershy grumbled.

"How was I supposed to know they hadn't told her yet?" Discord protested. "No pony told me I wasn't supposed to tell her!"

"We told you to keep it quiet!" Rainbow Dash scolded. She looked to where her daughter had gone. "Poor kid. Boy, do we got a lot of explaining to do. Come on, Soarin."

The two pursued Prism, Scootaloo and Grandpa Rainbow following them.

"Mummy," Gemstone said, looking up at Rarity. "What's Afghanisteed?"

"What?!" Cherry gasped. "How can you not know what Afghanisteed is?! It's all over the news!"

"She can't read, remember?" Raspberry whispered.

"Well yeah, but we talked about it in class!"

"Oh, right," said Blueberry. "She was sick that day."

Rarity sighed and pulled her daughter closer. "Well, you see, my darling…Afghanisteed is a little country east of Zebrica."

"That's the zebra country, right?" Gemstone inquired.

"Yes. Well, for a while now, Afghanisteed has been overrun by…" She paused as she tried to think of the best way to explain this to her child. "…by a group of very bad cows called the al-Cowda. Now you know from the cows you've met in Ponyville that not all cows are bad, but these cows are. They've taken control of Afghanisteed and have done very bad things to its inhabitants, especially the ponies. They hate ponies. They have very strict rules like females cannot go outside without being covered head to toe, in very unfashionable apparel, I might add. They whip and stone those who disobey their rules.

"But they haven't stopped at Afghanisteed. They've attacked other nations, specifically the ones dominated by ponies. You remember that boat crash in Manehattan a few years ago?"

The unicorn filly nodded, recalling how she was shaking in her knees that day.

"That was planned by the al-Cowda. They've threatened Equestria and other countries time and time again, Afghanisteed being their home base. So the Princesses of Equestria have sent soldiers to stop the al-Cowda and help those suffering under their rule. That's… that's what Rainbow Dash and Soarin are going to do."

Gemstone shivered as her mother told the story. She looked to the door where Prism had fled. She understood why her friend was so upset.

Prism only managed to run as far as three feet from the Party Palace before her older siblings landed in her path. There was really no use running when your family consisted of the fastest flyers in Equestria.

"Prism, you don't understand," Lightning insisted.

"I understand perfectly!" their younger sister snapped. "Mom and Dad are leaving again! And this time they're never coming back!"

She tried to run the other way, but her mother was blocking it. "What are you talking about? Of course we're coming back!"

"Nothing will stop us from coming back!" her father declared.

Prism turned around and found that her entire family had surrounded her. She looked up at Scootaloo.

"You knew about this?"

The orange pegasus nodded guiltily. Prism turned to her grandpa.

"And you?"

He nodded too. One look at the twins and they admitted the same.

"So every pony knew but *me* ?!"

"We knew you'd take it the hardest," Soarin explained. "It wasn't even definite until about two weeks ago."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"We're Wonderbolts, Prism," Rainbow stated. "We're the toughest flyers in Equestria. They need ponies like us down in Afghanisteed and…well, your dad and I are the best."

"But why? Why do you even have to go?"

"Look, we don't want to go as much as you do…"

"Of course you do! You'd do anything to get away from me!"

Rainbow jumped back startled. "What?"

"You're ashamed of me! You've always been ashamed of me! That's why you're never around!"

The filly whimpered as she slid between Grandpa Rainbow's legs and continued running down the street.

"Prism!" Rainbow called.

She was about to go after her when her father grabbed her tail.

"Let her cool down," he said calmly. "If she's anything like you, she'll find a corner to cry in before letting any pony approach her."

Scootaloo flew up. "I'll just follow her and make sure that corner isn't in the Everfree Forest or something."

The corner Prism found was the far right one of the Cutie Mark Crusader clubhouse. She couldn't think of a safer corner in the world. Since she couldn't fly up to her cloud home, this was the closest thing to home she could find.

She let the tears fall with no regret. She didn't care about her reputation as a tough filly. She had every reason to cry.

Her parents were leaving and never coming back. No pony who'd ever gone to Afghanisteed had ever come back. So why would they

go? Didn't they love her? Didn't they care how miserable she would be if they never returned?

Afghanisteed. She hated that name. Even when she first heard it in school, it made her uncomfortable. The place was evil. It was a place where not just cows, but creatures of all kinds did very bad things. She'd heard rumors that even ponies had joined the al-Cowda.

She remembered when she was little, the al-Cowda had purposely crashed a ship into the World Trade Center in Manehattan and millions of ponies had died. It was the first time she had learned there were bad guys in this world…and the first time she had wished someone dead.

Now her parents were going to fight those bad guys. It wasn't as if they hadn't fought bad guys before, but Prism thought that the al-Cowda were worse than Nightmare Moon and changeling armies. They weren't magically gifted, but they would kill in cold blood.

She didn't hear the hoofsteps. It wasn't until she heard the voice of her unicorn friend that she snapped out of her thoughts.

"Prism, you alright?"

The pegasus sniffed and wiped her tears, but didn't turn around.

"I told you she'd be up here," Cherry whispered.

"They explained to us what was going on," Blueberry said gently.

"Great," Prism grunted. "You knew too."

"We didn't know until today," Raspberry declared.

Gemstone slowly seated herself beside her pegasus friend. "It's not like it's the first time your parents have gone away."

"Yeah, parents go on big business trips all the time," Cherry chimed.

"When we were three, Daddy went on tour with a circus because we needed the money," Blueberry stated. "This was before Mom and

Dad built the Party Palace. With the three of us to take care of, it was hard for them to keep up their party planning business and afford to keep the house."

"I remember that time!" Raspberry declared. "We had to live with the Cakes at Sugar Cube Corner for a while!"

"Yeah!" Cherry nodded. "And Dad was gone for six months! Hey, why didn't he take us with him again?"

"He said it would've been too much for three three-year-olds to move from town to town so much," Blueberry explained.

"Also, we were a bit of a hoofful," Raspberry snickered.

"And Mom had to handle all three of us on her own while helping the Cakes run Sugar Cube Corner."

"Even my parents go away every now and then," Gemstone claimed. "Mummy has all those fashion shows she can't always take me to, otherwise I'd miss school. And just last year, I didn't see my daddy for a while because he and Mum were fighting and needed to be away from each other for a bit."

"See?" Raspberry grinned. "Parents have to go away sometimes, but it's only because they love us."

"After Daddy came home from the circus," Blueberry stated, "we had enough money for a new home and Mom and Dad built the Party Palace."

"And Mum goes on all those fashion trips so she can earn money for our family," said Gemstone. "And Daddy said the separation from Mum helped them both realize how much they needed each other, and moved to Ponyville so Mum could be happy."

"And don't your parents go away all the time so they can do their job as Wonderbolts and provide for you and the twins?" Cherry piped.

"This isn't like that!" Prism snapped, spinning around to face them. "This isn't like any of those times they've been away! They're not traveling with a circus or running fashion shows or sorting out

feelings! They're going to *Afghanisteed* ! Do you know what that means?" She turned back to the corner and sobbed. "They might never come back."

"Seriously, who told you that?"

She turned at the sound of her mother's voice. She was standing at the entrance with her husband.

"Can you girls give us some privacy?" Rainbow quietly asked the fillies.

"Oh," Gemstone uttered, rising to her hooves. "Of course."

They trotted out of the clubhouse in silence, leaving the couple with their child. Rainbow slowly approached the filly.

"Do you really think we're leaving because we can't stand to be around you?"

Prism sniffed. "No. I just don't know why you would leave and go someplace so dangerous. I know you're the toughest pony in the world and all but…you might get hurt or…or…"

She looked up at her mother as she put an assuring hoof on her back.

"You're right," she solemnly admitted. "Anything could happen to us. But you didn't stick around long enough for us to tell you that we're not even doing any real fighting."

Prism wiped her nose on her foreleg. "You're not?"

"Don't get me wrong. I could take out an entire al-Cowda army singlehoofedly! You're father, however, might clip a wing."

"Hey!" Soarin protested.

"Oh, who are ya kidding?"

He sighed in defeat. "She's right."

"So if you're not fighting, why are you going?" Prism asked.

"The troops and refugees down in Afghanisteed need some pony to lift their spirits up," Rainbow explained. "That's why they need some of the Wonderbolts down there. They can entertain the soldiers while still having the skills to defend themselves in case of attack. That's why your dad and I were picked. We're the fastest and strongest in the crew, even without wings. And there was no way your dad was going without me to save his flank all the time."

"You've made your point," Soarin grumbled.

That got a giggle out of Prism, but she frowned as another thought occurred to her. "But…you said you might still get attacked."

"True," Rainbow replied. "We may not be soldiers, but we're still potential targets for the al-Cowda. That's why they're sending us to a training camp the week before we leave, so we can learn things to help us in the event of an attack: self-defense techniques, how to use a gun, how to fly in a battlefield, smooth-talking the al-Cowda in case we get captured, things like that. But we're mostly gonna be at the base while we're there. We might not even have to use any of those skills."

Prism hung her head. "But you're still going."

"Don't you get it, sweetheart?" her father said, walking up to her. "We're going for *you* ."

"Me? Why me?"

"We're going to lift the spirits of the soldiers who are fighting to make the world a better place for their children to live in, children like *you* ." He lifted her chin. "You remember when you heard about the big bad cows crashing that boat into the World Trade Center?"

She nodded with a whimper.

"Well, pretty soon, those big bad cows won't haunt you anymore, thanks to us and the troops in Afghanisteed."

"And if we *do* get attacked," Rainbow smirked, "we'll just kick their

butts!"

Prism smiled a little, but still looked sad. "How long will you be there?"

They glanced at each other.

"A year," Soarin whispered. "We won't even make it back for Hearth's Warming."

The filly hung her head again. "Figures."

"But we got an extended leave of two months with you guys," Rainbow pointed out, "so that we could spend as much time with you as possible before we go."

"And we promise you we'll come back," Soarin declared, "even if we've lost all our legs and wings."

The filly sniffed again. "You promise?"

The two glanced at each other before lifting their hooves and saying, "Cross our hearts and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in our eyes."

Knowing that no pony could break a Pinkie Promise, she embraced her parents and they wrapped her hooves around her in return.

But that didn't settle the uneasiness in her stomach.

The next day, Prism went to the library to see her Aunt Twilight. She was upstairs with her husband, Flash Sentry, preparing a nursery.

"A little to the left," Twilight ordered.

Flash flapped his wings and pushed the crib in that direction.

"Hmm. Now a little more to the right."

The pegasus stallion groaned. "Honey, do we have to do this now? The baby's not coming for another ten months!"

"What do you want us to do?! Wait until the last minute to make sure everything is prepared for her arrival?! We don't want our daughter to be without a room, do we?!"

"Hey, wait. Who said it's a girl?"

"Discord told me yesterday. Which reminds me. I need you to go through the list of two hundred and seventy-eight names I've written up."

"Two hundred and…?!" He collapsed in exhaustion.

Prism decided she had been standing by awkwardly long enough and cleared her throat. Twilight looked over her shoulder and smiled.

"Oh hello there, Prism. What brings you here?"

"Um…" the filly uttered, glancing at Flash. "I can come back later if…"

"No, we're fine," the stallion panted as he stood up. "Auntie Twilight here's just having her mood swings rather early in her pregnancy."

The alicorn groaned. "Shut up and pick a name."

She shoved a long piece of parchment into his chest. He rolled his eyes as he left the room to read it. Twilight grinned perkily and faced the filly.

"Now what can I do for you, sweetie?"

Prism sighed. "It's about my parents…and Afghanisteed?"

The princess' face grew serious. "I see. It must've been a shock for you yesterday."

"I just wanted to ask…is there anything that can be done about it, to stop them from going?"

"The decision's already been made, Prism. It's not even my place to decide which ponies go overseas. That's Celestia and Luna's

decision. Flash has even retired from the Royal Guard so he wouldn't have to leave the family we're starting." She paused to touch her stomach.

"But isn't there a faster way to end this war? Why can't the princesses go and do something? I mean aren't they all powerful alicorns? What about Uncle Discord? Can't he make everything right with a snap of his fingers?"

Twilight sighed and used her magic to bring forth a map of the world.

"You see this body of water separating Equestria and the continent containing Afghanisteed?" she asked as she indicated the blue area with a pointer. "This is Eternity's Crossing. This body of water is the border of immortals, creatures that live forever. You see, after Lord Tirek's first defeat over a thousand years ago, the Princesses decided it would not be safe for any more dangerous immortals to enter Equestria. So they put a magical barrier around it.

"It's difficult to explain how it works, but to put it simply, if any immortal should cross this barrier, even by teleportation, their immortality will be taken away and all their years will return to them."

Prism blinked. "What does that mean?"

Twilight bit her lip. "Celestia and Luna are thousands of years old. If they cross the border, they will turn to dust. The same will happen to Discord if he tries the same."

The filly shivered at the thought. "But what about Princess Cadence, or Princess Flutterby Lily, or you? They're not as old as the princesses, and didn't you give up your immortality to be with Flash or something? Didn't Princess Cadence do that too?"

The alicorn shook her head. "Even without the barrier, if a princess were to enter Afghanisteed, she would become the al-Cowda's number one target. Cadence is needed to protect the Crystal Empire and her daughter is not ready to succeed her. My niece's alicorn magic hasn't even developed well enough for her to protect herself against an army. As for me…well…"

She caressed her stomach. "I'm carrying another immortal being in me and I don't know what crossing the barrier might do to her. Even if it does nothing, I can't put my baby at risk."

"So…" Prism stammered, "is…is that why you can't go and use the Elements of Harmony on the al-Cowda?"

"That's one reason. The other reason is that Fluttershy is an immortal. While crossing the barrier won't kill her, Discord doesn't want her left vulnerable without him to protect her."

"So it's okay to send my parents into danger but not the princesses or even Aunt Fluttershy?!" Prism hung her head and sobbed. "It's not fair!"

Twilight placed her hoof on the filly's shoulder. "I know, I know. No pony likes war. Wars used to be scarce in Equestria, but…World Peace never lasts forever."

"But why Mom and Dad? Why not some pony else?"

"Then that wouldn't be fair to whoever's parents go instead of yours. Would you really wish that on someone else?"

Prism paused. "No."

"Your parents are the bravest ponies I know. They'll make it back okay."

"But what if they don't?"

"Well…you can't say it wasn't for nothing. The point is that they're going for the sake of Equestria and yourself and all you can do about it is cherish what little time you have left with your parents, so that when they do leave, you all have those memories in your heart to keep you going."

Prism looked into the alicorn's eyes. She was right. She still didn't like her parents going to a warzone, but she should not waste a minute of the summer she had with them, because even if they never came back, she at least would have those two months with them.

"Hey, how does Azura sound?" Flash called from the other room.

"Azura means blue!" Twilight shouted. "What if she turns out to be green or something?"

"Okay. Then how about Tracy?"

"Princess Tracy? Who are you kidding?"

"Hey! You wrote it down!"

As the couple continued arguing, Prism crouched to the floor and quietly backed out of the room.

The next two months were the best of Prism's life. Her parents were determined to spend every waking minute with their children. Soarin was more than happy to take both his daughters to the Ponyville Father-Daughter Dance on Father's Day, and while they were out, Rainbow took Thunder to dinner. A few days later was the Summer Sun Celebration and for the first time ever, Rainbow and Soarin let Prism stay up all night to watch the sunrise. Celestia and Luna had arranged the official celebration to be in Ponyville that year just for the Dashes.

Rainbow and Soarin attended every one of Lightning and Thunder's Junior League games. Prism loved watching with them, because they always bought her an extra bag of peanuts. They were grateful to be there when Lightning caught the winning ball at one game and when Thunder threw the last out at another.

They went on the camping trip to Winsome Falls, just as Rainbow Dash had promised. Grandpa Rainbow and Scootaloo even tagged along. Rainbow Dash showed Prism how to pitch a tent and told her the scary stories she had heard as a filly. Soarin had his hoof around his daughter the whole time to keep her from shivering. When they got to the rainbow-colored falls, they had contests on who could make the biggest rainbow splash. Rainbow Dash won, but only because she had flown up fifty feet and on the way down created a sonic rainboom.

One weekend, they went up to Cloudsdale to visit Soarin's parents, as they wanted to see their son before he went.

But the best part of everyday for Prism was when either her mom or dad would take her out for a fly. Even if she wasn't going anywhere on her own, it felt good to have one of her parents gripping her hoof the whole way.

The day the two Wonderbolts had to go off to the training camp came sooner than the Dashes expected. For a week, they went to a base at a secret location and returned home, but only for a day.

They spent that night on a large cloud, all five members of the Dash family plus Scootaloo, lying on their backs and making pictures out of the stars. Prism fell asleep with her parents on either side, Lightning and Thunder on their parents' sides, Scootaloo completing the circle.

The next morning, the train station was packed with ponies ready to see the brave couple off. Even the princesses were there, as Rainbow Dash was a dear friend of theirs. Nearly all the Wonderbolts were present, even the ones not joining them. The couple was especially glad to see Admiral Spitfire, since she had been Rainbow Dash's mentor and Soarin's friend since childhood.

Rainbow Dash embraced her five best friends in a group hug. She realized that it had been a while since she had gone on a big adventure without them. She remembered when it had been just the six of them. So much had happened since then.

Despite her toughness, she felt no shame in shedding tears.

"You take care of yourself, you hear?" Twilight sniffed.

"Please call on the mirror as often as you can," Fluttershy reminded her, as the five of them all had one now.

"Here are some apples for the trip," Applejack said, handing her a basket of the fruit. "Remember to stay strong."

"And even though you may be in a place where camouflage is in," Rarity stated, "still…try to look your best…or at least keep the

healthy habit of brushing your hair!"

"Thanks every pony," Rainbow hiccupped as she slowly moved out of the hug.

Pinkie wouldn't let her though and hugged her tighter around the waist. "Don't you forget us! And if you do…remember us again! And write to us every day! Or at least twice a week!"

Rainbow chuckled. "I think I'll miss you most, Pinkie, and all your crazy antics."

Pinkie sniffed and gave her friend one last squeeze before letting her go. Rainbow Dash and Soarin had saved their family for last. Rainbow hugged her father while Soarin said goodbye to his parents. They had a hard time letting go. Then Rainbow Dash came to Scootaloo, who had her head down and was breathing sharply.

"Scoots, are you…are you crying?"

"No." After a pause, she sniffed and looked up at her mentor with tear-filled eyes. "Yes."

The sisters threw their hooves around each other.

"Take care of them," Rainbow whispered.

Scootaloo nodded. "You know I always do."

The couple moved on to the twins, hugging both of them at the same time.

"Watch over your sister," Rainbow commanded. "And the minute she flies and or gets her cutie mark, you'll call us, okay?"

"Of course," Lightning replied, wiping her nose.

"And keep up with the baseball," Soarin said. "You kids are doing great."

"We love you guys," Thunder choked.

"We'll miss ya," Lightning added.

"We love you too," their parents said together.

They pulled away from the twins and looked down at their youngest child. They stared at each other, wanting to say something but weren't sure what. Finally, Prism broke the silence as she reached into her saddlebag.

"Here." She took out a piece of paper. "I drew a picture for you guys to take with you."

They looked at the drawing and laughed. It was a picture of the two of them fighting giant cows with devil horns. The caption said: *Mom and Dad beating up the al-Cowda.*

"It's beautiful, honey," Soarin declared, clutching it to his heart. "We'll keep it forever."

Prism whined as she threw her hooves around her parents' legs. They were stunned for a second but then placed their hooves on her shoulders and nuzzled her mane.

"If they come at you," Prism moaned, "you kick their butts, okay?"

Rainbow grinned. "We'll kick 'em twice. The second will be from you."

That got a giggle out of the filly.

"We have something for you too," her father said, taking a package out of his bag.

"What's this?" Prism asked.

"It's that birthday present you didn't open," her mother smirked. "We thought it'd be best to give it to you now."

"Last call for Stableside!" the conductor shouted.

Rainbow sighed. "That's us. Then it's a slow-moving boat to Zebrica and a long cart ride to Afghanisteed."

They embraced their children one last time.

"I love you," Prism whispered.

"And we love you," Soarin replied, kissing the top of her head.

"More than you'll ever know," Rainbow added, doing the same.

It all happened so fast. Before Prism knew it, her parents were slipping through her hooves and stepping on the train. She watched as the train pulled out of the station, her parents' blue hooves waving out the window, until they disappeared into the horizon.

The platform silently cleared as the ponies walked (in some cases, flew) slowly home, leaving the Dashes alone. Prism, still gazing to where her parents had gone, rubbed her eyes and sniffed. She didn't look up as her sister put a hoof on her shoulder.

"Hey," Lightning said softly. "You wanna go to the park and play some catch?"

The filly took a deep breath. "Yeah. Just…can I be alone for a sec?"

Scootaloo nodded. "Sure. We'll be waiting right over there."

As the sound of their hoofsteps faded away, Prism gazed down at the brown paper package and slowly unwrapped it. She gasped as she held blue and yellow fabric in her hooves.

It was a Wonderbolts uniform, just her size.

As she unfolded it, a note fell out. She picked it up and what it said brought her to tears:

For our littlest Wonderbolt.

We know you'll miss us. We'll certainly miss you. But no matter where we are, we'll always be with you.

And if it makes you feel any better, we've decided that once we get back from Afghanisteed, we're retiring from the Wonderbolts. Yes, it's always been our greatest dream to become Wonderbolts, but

we've had a new dream for a while now.

It's you guys.

You're only gonna be a kid for a few more years, Prism. We don't wanna miss any more of it.

But don't give up on flying, or your cutie mark, just because we won't be there to see you. You're gonna make us proud, sweetheart. We know it.

And we will keep our promise. No matter what it takes, we will come back to you.

Love, Mom and Dad

Prism grinned as she held up the small uniform.

"I'll make you proud, Mom and Dad," she whispered. "I promise."

I had to write this now that my dad is in Afghanistan (not to fight, mind you). It got me wondering: what if Equestria had a similar situation? I figured Rainbow Dash and Soarin were the most likely candidates to go to a warzone. They were originally going to fight but then I realized that the Wonderbolts are more like performers rather than fighters, even if they did try to stop giant Spike in "Secret of My Excess." They're like performers with military training, so they could still be sent to a warzone.

Thank my mom and brother for coming up with the names Afghanisteed and the al-Cowda (plus evil cows are a thing now thanks to IDW comics). The Equestrian geography in here was based on vikonaut's map of Equestria and Beyond, mostly on the names and locations of places. I have no idea what the Eternity's Crossing is, but I used the name to help me make an explanation as to why they're not using magic to make everything all better. I hope it's believable enough.

If you didn't read the fanfics before this, you should know that this universe was created before Season 4 happened and now

that I think about it, Discord would've taken care of the plunder seeds and Tirek because he was really good, so no sacrifice of the Elements, no magic box, no Friendship Castle in this universe (as Tirek wouldn't have destroyed the library).

Thank you for reading, and thank you to all you Americans who have gone to places like Afghanistan and Iraq to help make the world a better place.

First Crush

College for the past two months has been pretty hectic, with the new semester, the play, then midterms, plus complications with "Bride of Discord"... I was hoping to get this done earlier, but I found so little writing time.

Prism was almost glad to be going back to school. Since her parents left for Afghanisteed, life had been pretty grim. Even if they did call her every week, it just wasn't the same. Just a few days ago, there had been an explosion in Afghanisteed and it had frightened her. One could imagine her relief when her parents called her on the magic mirror Uncle Discord had given her, saying they were alright. Still, every day she couldn't shake the feeling that something bad would happen to them.

School would be the perfect distraction.

She looked up at the old red building and couldn't help but smile a little. She was going into fifth grade now. Soon she would be all grown up.

She glanced at her blank flank and sighed.

"Well," Thunder said, placing his hoof on his little sister's head. "Have fun, kid."

"We'll be here at three to pick you up," Lightning grinned.

"Thanks," Prism muttered.

At least some good had come out of their parents' extended absence. It was bringing the Dash siblings closer together.

Yet Prism would still watch in envy as the twins took to the skies.

She slowly walked over to the playground where the Tri-Pies were

taking their traditional spin on the merry-go-round, chanting as Cherry spun her two sisters:

" *Blueberry, Raspberry, Cherry Pie too,*

Sisters of red, dark pink and blue,

Three best friends forever

Exactly the same

Let's start the new year

As we shout out our names ."

"Blueberry!"

"Raspberry!"

"Cherry Pie!"

"YAY!" they all shouted.

"My turn, my turn!" Raspberry exclaimed.

She switched places with Cherry and they started again. Prism chuckled at the display.

"What are they doing?"

The pegasus turned to see her unicorn friend, Gemstone.

"They do this every year," Prism explained. "Ever since kindergarten, so they'll have good luck all year."

"Oh," Gemstone uttered. "Do you do anything like that with the twins?"

The pegasus frowned. "Mom would wake us up for morning exercises."

Who knew she would even miss *that* ?

"Sorry," her friend whispered.

"It's okay."

"Do you think my baby sister and I will do anything special some day?"

"Maybe. When's she coming again?"

"Early or mid-October. That's a month away! Why do babies take so long to come?"

"Beats me."

Once the Tri-Pies had finished their spinning, they hopped over to their friends.

"Can you guys believe it?" Blueberry squealed.

"We're in the fifth grade!" Raspberry piped.

"One more year and we graduate!" Cherry chimed.

"I hear we're gonna have a new foal!" Blueberry announced.

"Ooh!" Raspberry clapped. "Another friend! Is it a he or a she?"

"Does it matter?" Cherry shrugged.

"Maybe he or she will be a blank flank and we'll get a new member!"

"Oh!" Gemstone grinned. "That'd be nice! Maybe he or she will have new ideas for cutie marks!"

That perked Prism up a little. "Yeah. We could have our cutie marks by the end of the year!"

The bell rang and foals flocked to the little red building.

The classroom had been rearranged, with a new column of seats, making it four-by-four. The Tri-Pies sat in the first row, leaving the one of the far left vacant. Gemstone and Prism took their usual seats in the back. The latter blushed as she passed by the green

pegasus colt. He turned to her and they locked eyes for a second.

"Kicks," Prism said, clearing her throat.

"Penguin," Kicks responded coldly.

Gemstone looked between the two as Prism sat behind him.

"I can switch seats with you, if you'd like," the unicorn whispered.

Prism shook her head. "No, I'm good."

As usual, Mrs. Cheerilee was warm and cheerful as she greeted, "Good morning, class!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Cheerilee!" the class said in unison.

"Look at all of you, fifth graders! It seems like only yesterday you were all eager little five-year-olds on the first day of kindergarten."

"Ahem!" the Tri-Pies scoffed.

"Oh, sorry. I mean *four*- and five-year-olds. Now, I know you're all anxious to start the new school year…"

Kicks let out an exaggerated yawn which made Prism chuckle.

"…but before we begin, we have a new student. His name is Lemon Drop and he just moved from Manehattan."

"Ooh, Manehattan!" Gemstone exclaimed. "And he's a boy!"

"Just what we need," Prism groaned. "Another obnoxious colt."

"Hey!" Kicks protested.

Cheerilee opened the classroom door. When no pony came in, she leaned out and whispered:

"It's okay, sweetie. There's nothing to be afraid of."

All heads turned as the new colt walked in, but as soon as Raspberry's eyes beheld him, her pupils dilated and her jaw

dropped.

He was a unicorn, with fur as yellow as a lemon, eyes the color of caramel and hair as white as vanilla frosting. He wasn't smiling and his eyes were directed toward the ground, but as soon as she saw him, something inside Raspberry snapped.

Her stomach was doing backflips, her fur was standing on end, her ears were filled with string music and her heart was pounding so hard, she could've sworn it was about to burst out of her chest.

Before any flies could enter, her mouth closed and turned into the biggest smile she had ever made. Her eyes closed halfway as her head slowly sank into her hooves. As she continued to stare at the colt, a single thought ran through her head over and over again:

He's…so…cute…

"Lemon Drop," Cheerilee said warmly, "why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?"

Lemon Drop…such a perfect name!

The colt slowly lifted his eyes to the class and rubbed his foreleg awkwardly.

Aw, he's shy…it's adorable!

"Hi," he uttered softly.

His voice! So cute!

"My name's Lemon Drop. I'm from Manehattan. One of my moms lost her job so we came to Ponyville and…"

"Wait a minute!" Cherry interrupted. " *One* of your moms? You have more than one?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I'm adopted. I have two moms."

There was silence, until Cherry announced, "I like this kid already!"

He has two moms , Raspberry thought. *That makes him even more special!*

"Two moms?" Pin Cushion questioned. "That's weird."

"Pin Cushion!" Cheerilee scolded. "It's not uncommon for children to have parents of the same gender. Why don't you go pick an empty seat, Lemon Drop? I see there's one next to Raspberry."

The magenta filly straightened up and patted the chair beside her. Lemon Drop gave her a quick glance before seating himself.

"Hi," Raspberry greeted in a half giggle, half sigh. "I'm Raspberry Strudel Pie."

The colt looked at her and gently shook her hoof. "I'm Lemon Drop Heartstrings."

Heartstrings… Raspberry thought as she let out another bubbly giggle. *You have no idea how perfect that is…*

In the middle of Cheerilee's lesson, Cherry was surprised to hear a "Pssst!" from Blueberry. She turned to her sister who was sticking out her notebook and pointing to the sentence at the top of the page: *Look at Raspberry.*

Cherry leaned forward to look past her and saw their sister propping up her elbows, leaning her chin on her hooves and staring at Lemon Drop. Even though she was facing away from them, Cherry could've sworn she was smiling like a fool.

Cherry scribbled in her book and tilted it for Blueberry to see: *What about her?*

Blueberry wrote another note: *She's acting peculiar, don't you think?*

Cherry glanced at Raspberry again and answered: *Yeah. I mean she's happy all the time but I've never seen her THIS happy.*

And why do you think she's looking that way at the new colt?

She's also giggling kinda goofy-like, even by our standards.

Something strange is definitely goi…

"Blueberry, Cherry, are you passing notes?"

"No!"

The Cutie Mark Crusaders met at the merry-go-round as usual, but this time, had a new friend. Prism and Gemstone grinned as Raspberry walked up with Lemon Drop. However, the sight of her hoof holding his made Blueberry and Cherry glance at each other in confusion.

"So, Lemon Drop," Raspberry giggled, "these are my friends. That's Prism, that's Gemstone, and these are my sisters, Blueberry and Cherry."

"Hi," Lemon Drop uttered.

"We're the Cutie Mark Crusaders!" Prism announced.

The colt tilted his head. "Huh?"

"It's a secret society dedicated to helping little ponies earn their cutie marks."

"We couldn't help but notice you don't have one," Gemstone added.

Raspberry blushed. "Not that we've been staring at your flank or anything!"

Lemon Drop shrugged. "It's no big deal. I'm not really in a hurry to find my special talent."

"But we could always use a new member," Prism said warmly.

Blueberry bit her lip. "Um…are you sure? I mean…if he doesn't want to join…"

"I'll have to ask my moms," Lemon Drop said. "They can be a bit

overprotective."

"If you have two mums," Gemstone inquired, "how do you avoid confusion when you say 'Mum' or whatever you call them?"

"Well, when it's just one of them I call her Mom, but when I'm with both of them I say Mommy Lyra and Mommy Bon-Bon. Those are their names."

"They sound great!" Raspberry giggled.

"They are. They actually only adopted me three years ago. Honestly, I wasn't expecting to get two moms, but they're cool. Mommy Bon-Bon is really sweet and Mommy Lyra's always coming up with fun things for us to do."

"You think they might let you join our club?" Prism asked.

"Oh, please join, please!" Raspberry begged.

Blueberry and Cherry glanced at each other uneasily and came to a silent agreement.

"Conference!" they shouted.

The others were confused as they all huddled in.

"We…don't think Lemon Drop should join our club," Cherry said.

"What?!" Raspberry shouted. "Why?!"

"I don't know," Blueberry shrugged. "We just…have a funny feeling about him."

"Funny feeling? But he's such a sweetheart!"

"Rasp is right," said Prism. "He's a decent guy. I see no reason why he can't join our club."

"Me neither," Gemstone agreed. "After all, he doesn't have a cutie mark."

"Plus," Raspberry grinned, glancing over at the colt, "he's *so*

dreamy!"

"But he *can't* join us!" Blueberry insisted.

"And why not?"

"Because…" Blueberry bit her lip again. "Because…he's a boy!"

"Oh, come on!" Raspberry huffed. "That's no excuse!"

"That's true," Prism confirmed. "The rulebook says we can't discriminate based on gender."

"Yeah, isn't memorizing the rulebook your job, Blue?"

"He still can't join us!" Cherry snapped. "Because…because… because he has two moms!"

"So?" Raspberry shrugged. "I thought you liked that kind of stuff, Cherry."

"He just can't!" Blueberry and Cherry said together.

"As Spokespony of this club," Prism declared, "I motion that we settle this democratically. We vote on it. All in favor of letting Lemon Drop join?"

She, Raspberry and Gemstone raised their hooves.

"Those opposed?"

Blueberry and Cherry raised theirs.

"Three-to-two. He joins."

"Uh, you guys know I can hear you, right?"

The fillies turned around to see Lemon Drop standing right behind them. They all blushed red, Raspberry especially.

"Congratulations, Lemon Drop!" Prism exclaimed, attempting to break the awkwardness. "You can join our club!"

Raspberry threw her hoof over the colt's shoulder. "I can be your sponsor."

Gemstone tilted her head. "Since when do we have spons…?"

"Shhh!"

The bell rang and the foals groaned at the fact that recess was over.

"You think about it, Lemon," Prism winked.

"Ooh!" Raspberry piped, grabbing the colt's hoof. "I'll show you the way back to class!"

Lemon Drop blinked. "But I already know the way to…"

He was cut off as Gemstone gave him a slight push.

"Let her show you," she said slyly.

Blueberry and Cherry scratched their heads at the strange spectacle and spoke the same thought:

"What the hay is going on?"

At the end of the day, as the foals gathered outside the schoolhouse, Lemon Drop waved to a pair of mares. One of them was a yellow earth pony with pink and blue hair. The other was a green unicorn with green and white hair.

"That's my moms," he explained to the fillies.

"Ask them if you can come to our meeting this afternoon," Prism suggested. "We're meeting at four-thirty."

"I can show you the way to the clubhouse!" Raspberry volunteered.

Lemon Drop smiled a bit. "I'll ask them now."

As the colt ran to his moms, Blueberry and Cherry pulled their sister aside.

"What's the matter with you?" Blueberry demanded.

"Huh?" Raspberry asked.

"You've been acting funny all day!" Cherry declared. "Are you sick or something?"

The magenta filly grinned and nodded dumbly. "Yes. I'm *very* sick."

"What is it?" Blueberry inquired. "What kind of sick?"

Raspberry was about to answer but jumped out of Blueberry's hooves when she saw Lemon Drop returning.

"What they say, what they say?!" she exclaimed, bouncing up and down.

"They said no."

Raspberry ceased her bouncing and hung her head. "Oh."

"Well, not today, anyway. See, we have so much unpacking to do and they want me to stay home until that's done." He smiled and lifted her chin. "They said I could have a friend over though. Wanna come?"

The magenta filly gasped and her pupils turned into hearts. "Really?!"

Lemon Drop seemed unfazed by her excitement. "Sure." He turned to the others. "I'd invite all of you, but the house is such a mess, Mommy Lyra and Mommy Bon-Bon can't handle so many guests. Raspberry here seemed the most excited about me coming to the meeting, so…"

"Aw, it's cool," Prism said, waving her hoof nonchalantly.

"Yeah," Gemstone smirked, sharing a knowing look with the pegasus. "You two have fun!"

"We will!" Raspberry squealed.

Lemon Drop walked back to his parents. Raspberry was about to follow him when her sisters each placed a hoof on her shoulder.

"But Rasp, we were gonna go to Sugar Cube Corner after school," Blueberry reminded her.

"Aw, but we *always* go to Sugar Cube Corner!" Raspberry groaned.

"But we always do it together!" Cherry exclaimed. "Especially after the first day of school! It's tradition!"

"But it's not every day we have a new friend! Especially a cute one!"

She attempted to leave, but her sisters grabbed her forelegs.

"But we won't be there with you!" Cherry insisted.

"Sorry," Raspberry shrugged. "I can't help it if Lemon Drop can only bring one friend. We can all hang out together once his house is cleaned up."

"Then can't we just wait till then?" Blueberry pleaded. "So we'd at least be doing it together?"

"Get real, girls! We can't do *everything* together!"

They gasped in horror and released their hold on Raspberry.

"Hey Raspberry, you coming?" Lemon Drop called.

The magenta filly sighed and her sisters gawked as she seemed to defy gravity.

"Coming!" she replied dreamily.

As she floated towards Lemon Drop, Blueberry and Cherry jerked forward. The gasped again and grabbed the imaginary rope that held the triplets together. Raspberry stopped in mid-air, yet she was unknowingly tugging on the cord. Blueberry and Cherry placed their hooves firmly on the ground as they tried to pull her back. Suddenly, there was a snap and the two fell backward, landing on their rumps.

Their sister glided blissfully away, as if she hadn't felt the connection between her and her sisters break like a toothpick. Blueberry and Cherry watched her go in shock.

"We've lost her," the latter said.

Later that afternoon, the Cutie Mark Crusaders met in their clubhouse, but one member was missing. Prism was helping Gemstone with her homework while Blueberry and Cherry kept glancing at the clock every three seconds. No matter how many times they looked, the big hand remained on the nine and the little hand between four and five.

"Where is she?!" Cherry demanded. "She's fifteen minutes late!"

"And we can't start without our Secretary!" Blueberry declared. "Who's gonna write everything down?"

"Don't you have photogrammic memory or something, Blueberry?" Gemstone asked.

"It's photo *graphic* memory, and yes, but…we still can't have the meeting without Raspberry! Where is she anyway?"

"Chillax," Prism said coolly. "She probably got caught up at Lemon Drop's place."

"What excuse does that give her?" Cherry scowled.

"She's having fun. You know," the pegasus winked at Gemstone, "getting to know him…"

"Chatting him up…" the unicorn giggled.

"Sharing interests…"

"Courting…"

The two triplets tilted their heads.

"Do you guys know something we don't know?" Blueberry inquired.

The unicorn and pegasus giggled again.

"Isn't it obvious?" Gemstone smirked. "Raspberry is what Mother would call a 'smitten kitten.'"

"Raspberry's not a kitten, silly!" Cherry snorted.

"No. I mean she's been bitten by the love bug."

Cherry shrieked. "She's been bitten by a bug! Oh my gosh! We gotta find her and suck the poison out!"

Prism rolled her eyes. "She means Raspberry has a crush on Lemon Drop!"

The Tri-Pies blinked three times. Then their mouths twisted and broke into laughter.

"Raspberry…" Blueberry wheezed, "crush… *Lemon Drop* ?!"

Cherry gripped her belly as she fell to the floor. "That's…the most… hilarious thing I've ever heard! Good one!"

Their laughter died down when they saw the questioning looks on their friends' faces.

"You were serious?" they said together.

"Of course," Gemstone replied.

"No, no, no!" Blueberry said, shaking her head with a grin. "You've got it all wrong! Raspberry can't have a crush on Lemon Drop, because we agreed we were all gonna marry male triplets!"

"Or female," Cherry added, "depending on our preferences!"

"And Lemon Drop's not even her type."

"How so?" Prism asked.

"Because he's not *our* type!" Cherry chimed.

"We're all the same," Blueberry explained, "so naturally, we'll all like the same type of guy."

"Or girl!"

Prism rolled her eyes again. "Oh come on, you guys aren't *that* much alike."

"Yeah, we are!" Cherry insisted.

"You're not even the same colors," Gemstone pointed out.

"Well, our parents had to tell us apart *somehow* ," Blueberry argued.

"You read different types of books," Prism reminded them.

"Mere technicality," Cherry said, waving her hoof.

"Blueberry has photograph memory," Gemstone stated.

" *Photographic* ," Blueberry corrected.

"And that's only because she's the super smart one," Cherry added.

"See?" said Prism. "How can you say you three are exactly alike when you call Blueberry the super smart one, Cherry the super hyper one and Raspberry the super sensitive one?"

"And if Raspberry's the super sensitive one," said Gemstone, "then it's no surprise she's the first to fall in love. After all, she reads all those romance novels."

"Okay!" Blueberry groaned. "So we have a few teeny, tiny, weeny, differences that are so teeny, tiny, weeny that they are insignificant. That doesn't prove that Raspberry's in love!"

They turned at the sound of a long, dreamy sigh. Raspberry was standing at the entrance, her eyes half-closed and staring off into space, her legs wobbling as she walked dazed into the clubhouse.

"Where've you been?!" Cherry demanded. "We've been waiting for hours!"

"It's only been eighteen minutes," Prism grumbled.

Raspberry sighed again as she collapsed to the floor. "I was with my sweet Lemony Drop."

Her sisters raised their eyebrows. " *Lemony* Drop?!"

"Ooh," Gemstone marveled. "I'm guessing things went well?"

"He's so wonderful!" the magenta filly cried, wrapping her forelegs around her torso. "He's adorable, he's nice, he likes to collect stamps, and every time I'm around him, I hear Tchaicowsky's 'Romeo and Juliet!'"

"Chaycow-who?" Cherry questioned, scrunching her nose.

"Tchaicowsky," Gemstone replied, "the famous Moscow composer."

Prism gave the unicorn a funny look.

"What? I take piano lessons!"

Blueberry bit her lip as she and Cherry stood over their sister. "Uh… Rasp? You're not…crushing on this guy, are you?"

Raspberry's grin widened. "No."

"Oh, good," Cherry sighed in relief.

"I'M HEAD OVER HOOVES IN LOVE WITH HIM!"

"WHAT?!" her sisters shouted.

"But you've only known him for a day!" Blueberry argued.

"It doesn't matter!" Raspberry declared. "It's true love! And we're gonna get married and have ten foals and live happily ever after!"

"But…" Cherry uttered, her lip quivering, "we…we agreed we'd get married together…with other triplets…"

Raspberry scowled and sat up. "No! *You* agreed to that! I never got any say in that! Besides, what are the odds of us falling in love with

another set of triplets?" Her smile returned as she lay back down. "My little Lemony Drop is the one for me!"

Her sisters looked like they were about the throw up while Prism and Gemstone let out a long "Awwwwww!"

"Well, as sweet and mushy as this is," Prism said, "we have a meeting to start. Raspberry, get your notebook out."

Raspberry's eyes popped open. "Oh!" She whipped out her notebook. "Right!"

"We should try jewelry making," Gemstone suggested.

"Oh yeah," Prism said, rubbing her chin. "You made us bracelets for Hearts and Hooves Day. Yeah, we could try that. Rasp, you got that down?"

Raspberry's pencil was moving much slower than usual and she had that dreamy look on her face again.

"Rasp?" Prism said again. "Raspberry!"

"Huh?" Raspberry jumped. "Who? Wha? What happened?"

"Did you get Gem's jewelry-making idea down?"

"Oh." The magenta filly blushed. "I, uh…"

Blueberry peered over at her sister's notebook and gasped. She grabbed it with a scowl.

"What is this?" she demanded, sticking the book in Raspberry's face. "What is *this* ?!"

The page had Lemon Drop's name doodled all over it.

"Sorry," Raspberry squeaked. "It's just…when we were talking about a mail delivery cutie mark, I thought of Lemon Drop's stamp collection and…"

"Lemon Drop this, Lemon Drop that!" Cherry exclaimed. "Can you talk about anything else?!"

"Humph!" Raspberry stood and stuck up her nose. "You girls are just jealous!"

"Jealous?!" her sisters shouted.

"Yeah! That I have a special some pony and you don't!"

She stormed angrily out of the clubhouse. Blueberry and Cherry turned to each other.

"Can you believe her?!" the latter growled.

"Jealous!" Blueberry spat. "Indeed!"

They followed Raspberry's example, but added a furious cry to their huff. Gemstone and Prism were left alone in awkward silence.

"Uh…" Prism shrugged. "Meeting adjourned?"

Dinner at the Party Palace was oddly quiet that evening. Well, not completely, as Pinkie Pie and Cheese Sandwich were carrying on a conversation about how much they despised oatmeal, but their daughters didn't chime in once. Raspberry was too busy daydreaming while using her fork to form her mashed potatoes into the shape of a heart. Blueberry and Cherry were glaring at her begrudgingly.

Their parents didn't seem to notice their daughters' lack of appetite as Pinkie jumped up and cried:

"Who's up for dessert?"

Raspberry straightened up and clapped her hooves. "Me!"

"Sure," Blueberry and Cherry mumbled.

"Good!" Cheese exclaimed. "Because it was my turn to make the

dessert tonight!"

He zoomed into the kitchen and returned with a chef's hat and a silver platter. Raspberry bounced in her chair excitedly as her father set the covered dish on the table.

"And tonight's dessert is…" He removed the cover. "Lemon cake!"

Blueberry and Cherry placed their heads in their hooves and groaned.

"Oh, goody!" Raspberry exclaimed, her dreamy grin returning. "Just like my little Lemony Drop…"

"It's not a lemon drop, silly!" Pinkie snorted. "It's a cake!"

"Lemon Drop's a new colt at our school," Blueberry mumbled.

"Yeah," Raspberry sighed, clasping her hooves together. "And he's the cutest, sweetest, most wonderful colt in the whole wide world!"

Pinkie gasped when she saw her blissful expression.

"Cheese," she whispered, taking her husband's hooves, "do you see what I see?"

"I think so, honey bunch!" Cheese Sandwich replied.

They touched cheeks and squealed, "OUR DAUGHTER'S IN LOVE!"

They zipped to Raspberry's sides.

"How old is he?" Pinkie asked.

"What color's his mane?" Cheese inquired.

"His eyes?"

"His coat?"

"Unicorn, pegasus, earth pony or rare male alicorn?"

"What size shoe does he wear?"

"Who are his parents?"

"Is he nice?"

"What are his hobbies?"

"Does he like whipped cream?"

Raspberry took a deep breath. "Ten, vanilla white, caramel brown, lemon yellow, unicorn, four, Lyra and Bon-Bon, yes, stamp-collecting, and yes!"

Her parents squealed again.

"Wait!" Pinkie exclaimed. "I know Lyra and Bon-Bon! They just moved back to Ponyville! Oh! We're gonna have to throw them a Welcome Home Party! Oh, sweetie! This is so exciting! Your first crush! Tell us everything! Now!"

"Well," Raspberry grinned, "when he first walked into the classroom, I heard Tchaicowsky's 'Romeo and Juliet' in my head…"

At the other end of the table, Blueberry and Cherry looked grimly at their slices of lemon cake.

"I'm not hungry," Blueberry muttered, shoving her plate away.

"Me too," Cherry whispered, doing the same.

Cheese Sandwich's smile faltered when he saw his other two daughters walk sadly out. While Raspberry continued her story, Cheese quietly pulled his wife aside.

"Honey," he whispered, tilting his head towards the two girls.

Pinkie caught a glimpse of them just before they disappeared. "Oh."

"I'll talk to them. You get the rest of the story."

His wife nodded in understanding and returned to Raspberry. Cheese followed Blueberry and Cherry up to their room. When he

opened the door, they were already on their beds. Cherry was bouncing a red rubber ball on the ceiling while Blueberry had her nose in a book, her eyes staring blankly at the page.

Cheese said nothing for a while as he sat next to Blueberry.

"You fillies care to tell me what's wrong?"

Cherry momentarily stopped her bouncing and Blueberry's eyes fleeted towards her father and then back to her book.

"I see," he sighed. "This wouldn't have anything to do with your sister's crush now, would it?"

Blueberry's eyes darted up and this time remained locked on her father.

"We're *not* jealous."

"I didn't say you were," Cheese said softly. "So what's the problem?"

Cherry threw her ball back up, almost making a crack in the ceiling.

"We don't like him."

"Oh?" Cheese asked, raising an eyebrow. "How so? Is he mean?"

"No," Blueberry grumbled.

"Does he not talk to you?"

"No," Cherry moaned.

"Then what's the problem?"

Blueberry slammed her book closed. "Raspberry's been acting like a goofball all day!"

Cherry tossed her ball on the floor. "She acts like we don't exist!"

"And it's all Lemon Drop's fault!"

"Yeah! He's driving our family apart!"

"Now, girls," Cheese said slowly. "Don't go blaming Lemon Drop for this. Raspberry isn't ignoring you. She's just a bit distracted. Ponies act that way when they're in love."

"Well we don't like it," Blueberry murmured.

"And we gotta stop it!" Cherry declared.

"Don't you dare," their father warned. "Look, just because your sister wants to spend more time with this colt doesn't mean she doesn't want to spend time with you anymore. Doesn't this happen every time you make new friends?"

"But we always make new friends together!"

"Girls, you may be triplets, but you can't do *everything* together."

"Why does every pony keep saying that?!"

"It's true. You're all gonna grow up and lead separate lives. You'll fall in love with different stallions, or mares, and you'll get married and have kids of your own. Well, maybe not all three of you will, but my point is that your sister wants to do some things on her own and she can. So don't ruin her first possible relationship just because you don't like the colt. That's the father's job."

He folded his hooves and waited for his daughters to respond. They said nothing and rolled away from him.

"Okay," he sighed, rising from the bed. "We can talk about this more when you're ready."

He slowly closed the door behind him. After a while, Blueberry let out a sigh.

"He's right," she mumbled. "We can't ruin our sister's first possible relationship."

"Yeah," Cherry moaned.

Blueberry sat up. "But maybe some pony *else* can."

Cherry jumped up and looked at her in confusion. Then a wicked grin spread across Blueberry's face. Cherry's eyes widened and her grin grew to match her sister's.

"You want me to do *what* ?!"

Kicks really didn't know what to expect when he was passed a note telling him to meet in the school basement at recess. He figured it was something weird when he entered the old headquarters of the Foal Free Press and the large brown chair behind the big desk rotated slowly to reveal two of the Tri-Pies with sinister looks on their faces.

What they asked of him was the last thing he expected.

"You heard us," Blueberry said coolly, tapping her hooves together. "We want you to *take care* of Lemon Drop."

"And by *take care* of him," Cherry snickered, "we mean DESTROY HIM!"

Kicks jumped as she slammed her hoof on the desk.

"You don't mean…?" he gulped. "Geez! I may be a bully, but I'm no hit pony!"

"No, no, no, no, no," Blueberry shook her head. "We don't mean destroy him *literally* . We mean tease him, humiliate him, make him look like a fool in front of the whole school!"

Kicks blinked. "Why? I mean I enjoy a good tease as much as the next foal, but why Lemon Drop? What he ever do to you?"

"That is none of your concern!" Cherry snapped. "Are you in or out?"

"I don't know. Dad warned me about taking jobs like this…"

Cherry whispered in her sister's ear. Blueberry grinned as she took out a file.

"We wouldn't want *these* floating around the playground now, would we?"

She tossed the folder in front of Kicks and the pictures spilled into view. The colt gasped in horror.

"Where did you get these?!"

"Your sister was easily persuaded," Blueberry smirked.

"Also…" Cherry leaned forward and whispered, "Prism? Really?"

The photographs were of his room, which was decorated in drawings of him and Prism: holding hooves, kissing, getting married…all of which would incriminate him.

"There are plenty more copies where those came from," Blueberry said, looking nonchalantly at her hooves.

"This is blackmail!" Kicks shouted.

"No. It's *blue* mail!"

Cherry frowned. "I thought we were going with *cherry* mail!"

"Bluemail sounds cooler." Blueberry turned back to the colt. "So, do we have a deal?"

Kicks looked at the pictures and groaned in defeat.

"Higher, Lemony! Higher!" Raspberry shouted as Lemon Drop pushed her on the swing.

"Any higher and you'll fall off!" he insisted.

"Higher! So we can touch the clouds!"

Lemon Drop shook his head with a laugh. "You really are something, Razz!"

A voice called from behind, "Hey!"

Raspberry planted her hooves on the ground and she and Lemon Drop turned around to face Kicks.

"I wanna talk with ya, Lemon Drop!"

"Oh," the unicorn said. "Sure. Your name is Kicks, right?"

"Yeah, that's right. And I've got something to say to you!"

"Okay. What?"

"Uh…"

Kicks glanced over his shoulder. A group of foals had gathered to see what the shouting was about. Among them was Blueberry and Cherry, who were urging him on.

"You, uh…have a dumb face!"

His blackmailers slapped their foreheads. Lemon Drop only blinked.

"Is that it?"

"No!" Kicks exclaimed, a little louder than he intended. "I…"

Cherry crushed her hooves together and nodded.

"You, uh…what you doing hanging out with a girl, huh? You got cooties?"

Lemon Drop shook his head. "You still believe in cooties? How old are you?"

He turned to walk away.

"Stop! I'm not finished with you! You…you…"

Kicks looked back at the two Tri-Pies. Cherry mouthed: *Two moms.*

"Right, uh…" He stuck out his chest, making himself look as tough as possible. "What's the deal with you having two moms?"

That made the unicorn stop. He slowly faced the pegasus again.

"Why do you ask?"

Kicks winced for a second, actually hating what he was about to say. "Every pony else has a mom and a dad! Why don't you have a dad? Do you like colts?" He addressed the crowd. "Lemon Drop here is a colt-cuddler!"

A few foals snickered and Lemon Drop shrank a bit. Raspberry grabbed his hoof.

"Come on," she whispered. "Let's get out of here."

But Lemon Drop narrowed his eyes in determination. He wrenched his hoof out of her grasp and stood firmly before the pegasus colt.

"Who cares if I have two moms?!" he snapped. "I'm not the only one! Actually, I'm quite lucky to have them! It's better than having no mom at all! And just because my moms like each other doesn't mean I like colts! Who told you that garbage?"

Many "oohs" erupted from the crowd. Kicks was stunned. He had not expected the twerp to stand up to him. He looked to his employers for help. They were also surprised, but they shook it off and both made the crushing motion. Kicks looked back at the unicorn.

"Well…" he stammered. "You…I…take this!"

He stuck out his hooves and shoved them into Lemon Drop's chest. The unicorn cried out as he fell backward into the swing, flipped over, hit his head on the ground and tumbled down the hill. Raspberry screamed as her crush splashed into a mud puddle.

Many of the foals, including Blueberry and Cherry started laughing. Kicks looked at his hooves in shock. Gemstone and Prism, the latter especially, had watched the scene in horror.

At the bottom of the hill, Lemon Drop sniffed as a tear fell from his eye.

Raspberry's blood boiled in rage. She scowled at the bully.

"WHAT THE HECK IS YOUR PROBLEM?!"

That brought silence upon the playground. Raspberry slid down the hill and offered her hoof to Lemon Drop. She whispered softly as she wiped away as much mud as she could and led him towards the schoolhouse.

Blueberry and Cherry groaned in annoyance.

"Well that didn't work," the latter grumbled. "Now she's more into him than ever!"

"Time for Plan B," Blueberry declared.

"What's Plan B?"

"I don't know. We'll figure it out at the clubhouse."

Kicks was in for another surprise after school. He screamed as he was grabbed from around the corner of the building and thrown against the brick wall. He was thrilled at how Prism's hooves gripped his chest and frightened at the death glare she was giving him.

"Alright, punk!" she bellowed. "Who put you up to it?!"

"Put me up to what?" Kicks said in a cracked voice.

"What you did to Lemon Drop," Gemstone replied, stepping out from behind Prism. "That was absolutely horrid!"

"What makes you think some pony put me up to it?"

He cried out as Prism slammed him against the wall.

"I know you well enough to know that you may be a jerk, but you would *never* push some pony down who was too weak to defend himself!" she declared. "Maybe call him names, but not rough him!"

"I didn't mean to hurt him too hard!" Kicks insisted. "I was only supposed to humiliate him! Oops."

Prism pulled him closer. "Who put you up to it?"

He was scared out of his wits, but he furrowed his eyebrows and tried to look strong.

"I'll never tell!"

Their noses were now touching.

"You'll tell me," she threatened, "or I swear, I'll punch you so hard that all your teeth will fall out! Even the grown-up ones!"

Kicks smiled. "Is that a promise?"

Prism rolled her eyes. She had forgotten who she was talking to. She glanced back at Gemstone and whispered low enough so she wouldn't hear.

"If you don't tell me," she warned, "I'll tell the entire school that you have a crush on me."

Kicks' eyes widened in fear. "You wouldn't!"

She raised her hoof. "Wanna bet?"

"Your rep will be as ruined as mine!"

She was so close now that he could see the dangerous gleam in her eye. "I'll take my chances."

"I've got it!" Cherry declared. "We'll use one of our party cannons to blast him to the moon!"

"No, no, no," Blueberry groaned. "We'll get in trouble with Princess Luna."

"Oh, that's right. How about we pack him in a box and ship him to Camelu?!"

"That won't work. They'll just return it like they did last time."

"Right. Darn. Then how about…?"

"YOU HIRED KICKS TO KNOCK OFF LEMON DROP?!"

The triplets jumped at Raspberry's booming voice. Their sister's eyes were full of fury and steam was coming out of her ears and nose as she stomped into the clubhouse.

"OF ALL THE JERKY THINGS ANY PONY COULD POSSIBLY DO! WHAT DO YOU HAVE AGAINST MY BOYFRIEND?!"

Blueberry's fear was quickly replaced with anger. "HE'S A THREAT TO OUR SACRED BOND OF SISTERHOOD!"

"AND HE'S NOT RIGHT FOR YOU!" Cherry bellowed.

"THREAT?!" Raspberry repeated. "NOT RIGHT FOR ME?!"

Outside, Prism, Gemstone and Lemon Drop were standing beneath the clubhouse, covering their ears as the tree shook.

"Should we go up there?" Gemstone asked, quivering.

"Let's give them a few more minutes," Prism whispered.

"WHAT DID LEMON DROP EVER DO TO YOU?!" Raspberry demanded.

"HE STOLE YOU FROM US!" Cherry hollered.

"EVER SINCE YOU LAID EYES ON THAT KID, YOU'VE BEEN TREATING US LIKE DIRT!" Blueberry shouted.

"YOU DITCHED US AT SCHOOL…"

"YOU WERE LATE FOR OUR CRUSADER MEETING…"

"YOU WENT ON A PLAYDATE WITHOUT US…"

"IT'S LIKE YOU DON'T WANNA HANG OUT WITH US ANYMORE!"

Raspberry's mouth closed and her eyes blinked. "I…I didn't know you felt that way."

"WELL, WE DO!" her sisters yelled.

There was a long period of silence. Raspberry glanced between her sisters. After reflecting over how she had been acting the past few days, she sighed.

"I guess I *have* been ignoring you girls. I…I didn't mean to. It's just… this is the first time I've ever really liked a guy and I didn't wanna blow my chance. I'm sorry I ditched you guys yesterday and I'm sorry I said you were jealous, but…was it really necessary to hurt Lemon Drop like that?!"

Her sisters hung their heads.

"No," they groaned.

"We just didn't want to lose you as a sister," Cherry whimpered.

"Oh, girls," Raspberry said softly. "We'll always be sisters, no matter how many crushes I get. Even when I'm spending time with some pony else, I'll always find time for you. And I don't always have to choose between you and Lemon Drop. He wants to be part of our club so we can all hang out together. You'll really like him. He's a really nice guy."

"He is," Blueberry admitted. "We noticed how nice he was to you. It just felt like he was taking you away from us."

"But he's not," Cherry finished. "We see that now."

"We're really sorry, Rasp" they said in unison.

Raspberry smiled. "I'm sorry, too."

They moved in for a group hug and they could feel the bond between them restoring to what it once was, and getting stronger.

"Ahem," Prism coughed from the entrance. "I think there's some pony else you need to apologize to."

Gemstone and Prism were standing behind Lemon Drop, who approached the triplets nervously.

"We're really sorry for what we did to you, Lemon Drop," Blueberry said sincerely.

"Can you ever forgive us?" Cherry pleaded.

The colt rubbed his head. "Well, my head still hurts, but…sure." He held out his hoof. "Friends?"

Blueberry and Cherry grinned and touched his hoof. "Friends."

Lemon Drop turned to Raspberry. "So while you girls were yelling at each other…" He blushed and rubbed his foreleg. "I heard you say I was your boyfriend…"

Raspberry's cheeks turned redder than his. "I…I…"

"I've never had a special some pony before, but I'm willing to try."

Her eyes widened. "You mean…?"

"Sure. I mean if you want to and all. Besides," he said as he looked down at his hooves, "I think you're really sweet."

Raspberry's ears twitched and her mouth broke into a smile bigger than the one she'd made when she first saw him.

"YES!"

She threw her hooves around Lemon Drop's neck, tackling him to the ground. Every pony else laughed.

"Well, now that that's settled," Prism smirked, "you ready to be a Cutie Mark Crusader, Lemon?"

"Oh, he's ready, alright!" Raspberry exclaimed, squeezing her new coltfriend. "And he's gonna love it!"

Cherry stood at the podium with the Cutie Mark Crusader pledge open in front of her. Lemon Drop stood before her, wearing a Crusader cape. Raspberry held his left hoof for support.

"Raise your right hoof and repeat after me," Cherry ordered. "I, Lemon Drop…"

The colt raised his hoof and repeated, "I, Lemon Drop…"

"Take thee Raspberry…"

"Take thee Raspberry…"

"To be my lawfully wedded wife…"

"To by my lawfully wedded…WHAT?"

"JUST KIDDING!" the Tri-Pies shouted.

The fillies burst into laughter while Lemon Drop blushed in embarrassment. He glanced at the Crusaders and then at Raspberry's hoof.

What have I gotten myself into?

Seems like forever since I've written about the Tri-Pies. I did wonder what would happen should a rift come between them.

Yes, I like LyraxBon-Bon. Deal with it.

Baby Boo

Phew! Just in time for Nightmare Night!

Gemstone smelled something fishy when she entered the kitchen that morning. Well, it wasn't fishy, but waffle-y. It was who was making what was causing the smell that was fishy.

Sweetie Belle was at the waffle maker. It's not that Gemstone was surprised to see her aunt in her house. She had been staying at Carousel Boutique to help Rarity during her last few weeks of pregnancy. What surprised Gemstone was the fact that her aunt was cooking, and no matter how old she'd get, her mother would *never* let Sweetie Belle cook unsupervised.

Something was definitely fishy…or waffle-y.

"Um, Aunt Sweetie?" Gemstone said, clearing her throat. "What are you doing?"

Sweetie Belle looked down at her niece and laughed. "You mean what am I doing in the kitchen without my sister hovering over my shoulder? Well, kiddo, it just so happens that I'm in charge here while your parents are at the hospital."

The filly tilted her head. "The hospital? What's wr—?"

Her eyes grew big as realization came to her. "You mean…?"

Sweetie Belle nodded. "Rarity's water broke last night."

"That would explain the screeching I heard." Gemstone grinned. "So she's coming? My baby sister's coming?!"

"Yup," the mare replied as she used her magic to levitate the waffles out of the cooker and onto two plates. "They didn't wanna wake you, so they asked me to stay with you. They expect us to head on over

there after breakfast."

"What are we waiting for then?! Let's go!"

Gemstone galloped out of the kitchen.

"Gem, wait!" Sweetie Belle called. "Your mom will kill me if she finds out you didn't eat your breakfast!"

The filly returned and stuffed the waffle in her mouth.

"Awl duh!" she grumbled before racing off again.

Sweetie Belle shook her head as she followed her, her waffle floating beside her.

Gemstone pressed her face against the glass as she searched the cradles of newborns.

"Which one is she?"

"She's still with her mother," Nurse Redheart said. "This way."

Sweetie Belle took her niece's hoof and followed the nurse. Gemstone grew more and more nervous as they walked through the maternity ward.

"Do you think she'll like me?" she whispered to her aunt.

"Of course, she will," Sweetie Belle replied. "She's your little sister. Little sisters always look up to their big sisters. I know from experience."

"Here we are," Nurse Redheart announced, opening one of the doors.

Rarity was in bed, wearing a blue hospital gown, Fancy Pants standing over her. As Gemstone approached her parents, she realized they were staring down at a small bundle in her mother's hooves. They looked at their daughter and smiled.

"Gemstone," Rarity whispered, holding out the bundle. "Come see your new baby sister."

Gemstone stood on her hind legs and placed her front hooves on the bed to get a closer look. Wrapped in a blanket was a little, round, white head. A horn so small, it might as well be the tip of a pencil came up from its forehead, a strand of lavender curling around it.

"My sister," Gemstone whispered in awe.

"Her name is Jewel," Fancy Pants said, lifting his elder daughter onto the bed.

"Jewel…"

"Do you want to hold her?" Rarity asked.

Gemstone reached out her hooves but hesitated. "What if I drop her?"

Her mother chuckled. "You won't. But be very careful. She's sleeping."

She gently handed the bundle to the filly and Gemstone held the newborn close to her chest. She had cradled a foal before, but this one was surprisingly light, almost like she was cradling a tuft of cloud.

"She's so…tiny," Gemstone muttered.

The newborn's eyes fluttered open and two tiny sapphires stared up at her in wonder. Gemstone expected her to cry, but instead her mouth opened in a smile.

"She likes me!" Gemstone exclaimed.

Her parents laughed.

"I take it you like her too?" Rarity inquired.

"Of course!" the filly declared, giving her sister a gentle squeeze. "She's the most perfect baby sister in all Equestria!"

"Phew!" Sweetie Belle sighed in relief. "I was worried this was gonna be another me and Rarity!"

"Hey!" Rarity protested.

The adults laughed again while Gemstone stared lovingly at her sister. She was so beautiful, so small, so delicate. It had taken forever, but her Hearth's Warming wish had finally come true.

Gemstone brushed her sister's lavender curl and whispered, "I'm going to be the best big sister you could ever have, Jewel. I promise."

When Jewel was brought home, all of Rarity's friends came to see the newborn, with the exception of Rainbow Dash and Soarin who watched through Prism's magic mirror.

"Aw, look at the cutie!" Soarin exclaimed.

"Yeah," Rainbow shrugged. "I suppose she's cute."

"You kidding?!" Pinkie screeched. "She's adorable!"

"I just wanna pinch her cute wittle hooves!" Cheese Sandwich cooed.

"We wanna see!" the Tri-Pies chanted, jumping up and down. "We wanna see!"

Discord teleported in front of the crowd in a police uniform. "Step aside, folks! Potential playmate coming through!"

Fluttershy rolled her eyes as she carried her toddler Zany over to the crib.

"Zany," Fluttershy coaxed, "this is Jewel."

"Jewel!" Zany piped.

"That's right. She's your new friend."

"Friend!"

A pink rattle materialized next to Zany and floated down to Jewel. The newborn clapped her hooves in delight before hugging the rattle.

"Awwwwwwww!" the entire room said in unison.

Applejack carried Applespike to the crib. The dragon-pony was sucking on an emerald. Jewel looked up at the new baby and tilted her head in curiosity.

"Applespike," Applejack whispered, "meet Jewel."

The dragon-pony perked up at the mention of the word "jewel," but was confused since he already had a jewel in his mouth. He looked down and noticed the foal holding the pink rattle. He had seen Zany conjure it up and figured he should give something to the foal too.

He took out his half-eaten emerald coated in spit. Jewel stared at it and let out an unsatisfied shriek. Spike couldn't help but chuckle.

"She really *is* Rarity's daughter, huh?"

The room erupted in laughter. Jewel broke it with a loud wail.

"Oh dear," Rarity said. "Feeding time."

"Let me feed her!" Gemstone cried, attempting to push through the crowd.

Sweetie Belle stepped her hoof in front of the filly.

"I don't think you'd want to, Gem. You see, newborn foals are fed in a… *special* way."

The filly tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

Her aunt whispered in her ear, which made Gemstone's eyes widen.

"Ew, gross!"

"Told you wouldn't wanna help," Sweetie Belle murmured.

A week later, Gemstone's grandparents came to see their new granddaughter. Jewel laughed as Grandpa Magnum cradled her.

"Aw, isn't she just the cutest thing?" he chuckled. "She's got her mother's eyes, her grandma's hair and her sister's smile!"

"Why, she almost looks like Sweetie Belle when we brought her home!" Gemstone's grandmother declared. "You remember that, dear? Oh, she was so adorable! Always gurgling whenever she needed a change!"

"Mom!" Sweetie Belle groaned.

Jewel opened her mouth with a howl. Gemstone immediately jumped up.

"Let me handle it!"

"It's alright, sweetheart," Fancy Pants assured her.

He put his baby girl over his shoulder and patted her gently on the back. She let out a tiny burp.

"Oh," Gemstone said, slumping to the floor. "Good."

A cry came from the nursery and Gemstone raced up the stairs in excitement.

"Don't worry, Jewel! I'm coming!"

But her mother and aunt had gotten there before her. Rarity was holding her nose in disgust. Gemstone sniffed the air and covered her nose as well.

"This one's on you, Sweetie Belle," Rarity grumbled.

Her sister sighed. "I should've guessed."

She used her magic to levitate her niece out of her crib and onto the

changing table.

"Can I help?" Gemstone asked.

"I've got it covered," Sweetie Belle said as her magic undid Jewel's diaper.

"Oh," the filly uttered as she hung her head.

Rarity tilted her head in concern. "What's wrong, darling?"

"Is there any way I can help with the baby?"

"Of course, darling. You're a big help around here."

"But I haven't done anything for Jewel since she got here! I haven't fed her, burped her, changed her diaper, sung her to sleep… Shouldn't I be doing *something* ? I'm her big sister for crying out loud!"

"You've done a lot, Gem," Rarity said putting a hoof on her shoulder. "You've made her stop crying just by holding her, you've played peek-a-boo with her, you've told her stories…"

"Yes, but I never do anything responsible. I know I'm not usually the responsible one, Mummy, but I *want* to be responsible for Jewel. I'm her big sister and I want to help take care of her."

"You're already doing that, by being her playmate and comforter."

"But when can I do something really helpful?"

Rarity lifted her daughter's head so her eyes could meet hers. "When the time comes, I will let you know. Alright?"

Gemstone sighed and nodded.

It was Nightmare Night and Gemstone was jumping up and down so much that her mother was having trouble getting her into her costume. Since they now had six members, the Cutie Mark

Crusaders had decided to dress up as the Power Ponies. Rarity had made a Radiance costume for her daughter. If only she could get her in it.

"Darling, hold still!" Rarity demanded.

"This is going to be so much fun!" Gemstone exclaimed. "I love Nightmare Night! And with Lemon Drop in our club, we're going to get twice as much candy this year! Oh, and the festival! I've been working on my throwing! This year, I'm going to beat Prism at the spider web game! I'll beat her at *all* the games! Except for bobbing for apples. No, I will *not* get my mane all wet and will *not* bite into an apple that some pony else sank their teeth in!"

"Gemstone!" her mother breathed as she slid the pink diamond bracelets onto her daughter's hooves. "I know you're excited, but you're not even in your costume yet! Now, sit still while I put these diamonds in your hair."

"Sorry, Mum, but you know I *love* Nightmare Night! I think it's my favorite holiday after Hearth's Warming! Not sure why. Maybe it's the fabulous costumes! Or the candy! Or both! Oh, and I can't wait to see how Uncle Discord decorated his castle this year! Did you see what he did last year? He made it like Count Drakeula's castle! And guess who he dressed up as?"

"Count Drakeula?"

"Yes! He even grew a second fang! They were so big, I thought they were going to sink them in my neck and drain me of my blood!"

"Where do you get these ideas? Certainly not from your father. Must be your aunt's influence."

"Don't you like Nightmare Night, Mother?"

"Oh, I do, just with all the costume orders I get, I'm always pooped by the time Nightmare Night comes around that I forget to celebrate."

"You're coming to the festival though, aren't you?"

"I'll see if your father and I can swing by. There. Now for the finishing touch."

Rarity used her magic to levitate a purple mask and place it over Gemstone's eyes. The filly looked in the mirror and gasped. She turned around so she could see herself at all angles. She wore Radiance's blue jumpsuit, decorated in a diamond pattern and accessorized with a pink diamond choker and matching bracelets. She touched the tiny pink diamonds that were woven into her mane and tail.

"Oh, darling!" Rarity said amazed. "You look absolutely marvelous! Why, you look just like me, err, Radiance! You know, except your hair is blue and not purple."

"Think any pony will notice?" Gemstone asked.

"Probably, if they're a crazed comic book fan. But they'll forgive you, since you're a filly."

The front doorbell rang, which made Gemstone jump excitedly.

"They're here! They're here!"

Rarity watched as her daughter zoomed downstairs at a speed quite unlike her. She laughed as she slowly trotted after her. She paused when she heard a cough come from the bedroom she shared with Fancy Pants.

Meanwhile, downstairs, Gemstone swiped the front door open and was met with five foals with large sacks hanging from their necks, shouting:

"NIGHTMARE NIGHT! WHAT A FRIGHT! GIVE US SOMETHING SWEET TO BITE!"

Gemstone squealed as she embraced her friends. Then she moved back to admire their costumes. Prism was Zapp, because she had a rainbow mane. Blueberry was the Masked Matter-Horn, with plastic wings and a horn strapped to her back and forehead. Raspberry was originally supposed to be Fili-Second, because her coat color was the closest, but she let Cherry be her since she was her favorite

hero. Raspberry dressed up as Mistress Mare-velous instead, with Lemon Drop in a Saddle Rager costume holding her hoof.

"Wow, you look like the real Radiance, Gem!" Cherry complimented. "Except the hair, but still close!"

"Why am I Saddle Rager again?" Lemon Drop asked. "I'm not even a pegasus."

"Aw, but you're so cute in your wittle costume!" Raspberry giggled. "This'll be a great way to spend our anniversary!"

Prism scrunched her nose. "I thought your anniversary was yesterday."

"That was our 58th anniversary. Today's our 59th!" Raspberry squealed as she gripped Lemon Drop's foreleg with both hooves. "And tomorrow's our 60th!"

Cherry gasped. "You guys have been together for fifty-nine years already?!"

"I think she means fifty-nine days," Prism whispered.

"Oh."

"Does every day have to be our anniversary?" Lemon Drop asked with a gulp.

"Every day I spend with my sweetie pie counts!" Raspberry cooed, squeezing him tight.

Lemon Drop looked at the girls and mouthed: *Help me.*

Rarity came down looking worried, but she smiled when she saw the Crusaders.

"Oh, aren't you all just darling?!" she exclaimed. Then her face turned serious. "Gemstone, might I speak with you in private?"

Gemstone didn't like the tone of her mother's voice, but she nodded and followed her into the kitchen.

"Your father is unwell," Rarity said softly.

The filly gasped. "He's not dying, is he?!"

"Oh no. It's just a cold. However, he has a fever and barely has the energy to get out of bed. He needs some pony to take care of him. Unfortunately, there's also Jewel to worry about. Sweetie Belle and the CMC are playing at the festival tonight. I can't take care of your father and Jewel at the same time."

"Can't you get a foalsitter?"

"Not tonight. Every pony's busy with Nightmare Night." Rarity sighed. "I'm sorry, Gemstone, but I'm afraid you can't go trick-or-treating tonight."

"WHAT?!" Gemstone shrieked. "But…I've been waiting all year for this!"

"I can't handle a sick stallion and a baby on my own. Do you know how cranky they can get? I need your help here."

"But…but…"

"You wanted to be responsible for Jewel. Now's your chance."

Gemstone opened her mouth, but she could find no argument. She hung her head and sighed. She sadly walked out of the kitchen and returned to her friends.

"Sorry, girls," she muttered, "and Lemon Drop. But I can't go out tonight."

"WHAT?!" they all shouted.

"Fancy Pants is ill and I need some pony to watch over Jewel," Rarity explained.

Cherry grinned as an idea occurred to her. "Why doesn't Jewel come trick-or-treating with us?"

"Yeah!" Blueberry agreed. "It'll be fun!"

"And with a baby in our group, we'll get ten times more candy!" Raspberry declared.

"I'm not sure…" Rarity said skeptically.

"I'll take care of her, Mother," Gemstone assured her. "You know I will."

"But out at night?"

"We'll back her up, Aunt Rarity," said Prism. "Don't forget. Gem and I took care of Zany and Applespike, and they're not normal foals! How hard could a little unicorn foal be?"

Rarity raised an eyebrow. "You do know they're magic, right?"

"But Jewel hasn't had any magical surges yet," Gemstone pointed out. "And didn't you say she was an 'easy foal?'"

Her mother sighed. "I suppose you're right. Hang on."

She went upstairs and returned with Jewel in her hoof. She placed her in her buggy that was by the stairs and rolled her over to the Crusaders.

"Now," Rarity said, pointing to the bag attached to the bottom of the carriage, "everything you need is in here: her bottle, at least ten diapers, her food, her pacifier, her rattle, and… Oh!" Her horn glowed and a yellow blanket floated down from upstairs. "Her blankie. Oh! One more thing!"

She raced upstairs and came back levitating a red cape and a black mask. She put them on the foal and grinned.

"There. Now you Power Ponies have a Humdrum."

"Gah!" Jewel exclaimed, clapping in delight.

"Are you sure you can handle this, Gemstone?"

"I'm sure, Mum," Gemstone said, smoothing out the tuft of lavender on her sister's head. "I can even push the carriage! Watch."

She closed her eyes and concentrated. Sure enough, blue light engulfed the stroller and it pushed forward. Gemstone opened her eyes and grinned.

"See? I can do it!"

Rarity smiled and hugged her eldest daughter. "Very well. But remember. Don't talk to strangers, don't take candy from strangers, don't feed any candy to Jewel because she hasn't teethed yet, don't stay out past nine and absolutely no adventuring in the Everfree Forest!"

Gemstone nodded. "Yes, Mother."

Cherry groaned. "Aw, can we go now? At this rate, the candy will be all gone!"

Rarity chuckled. "Yes, darlings, you can go now. Oh, wait!"

She used her magic to take candy out of a plastic cauldron and placed one piece in each of the Crusaders' bags.

"Enjoy Nightmare Night, girls!" she chimed. "You too, Lemon Drop."

The children cheered as they embarked on their nightly crusade. Gemstone continued to push the stroller with her magic. She stood on the tip of her hooves to look at her sister and smiled.

"Are you ready for your first Nightmare Night, Jewel?"

A cheerful "Mah!" was her answer.

They went to Lemon Drop's house first because it was the closest. Lemon Drop felt it was his duty to knock on the door. It creaked open and they were greeted with a "BOO!"

They shrieked in surprise. Standing in the doorway was Lyra, dressed as…they weren't sure. She was wearing a plain white t-shirt and blue skirt and was trying to balance on her hind legs. On her front hooves were plastic things that looked like monkey paws

though not as hairy.

"Uh, what are you supposed to be?" Cherry asked.

"Can't you tell?" Lyra said in a spooky tone. "I'm a hu—"

"Don't you start!" called a voice.

Bon-Bon, wearing a classic witch costume, pushed the unicorn aside. She smiled down at the foals.

"Well, well, well," she said warmly. "What have we here? A team of superheroes?"

"We're the Power Ponies, Mommy Bon-Bon," Lemon Drop explained. "I told you this."

"Ah, yes! That's right!" She looked smugly at Raspberry. "Hi there, Razz. Don't keep our boy out too late, now! We wouldn't wanna call the police on you."

"Mom!" Lemon Drop whined.

"Yeah," Lyra chuckled. "We might have to get a SWAT team to break you two apart!"

"Mom!"

"Don't worry Misses Lyra and Bon-Bon," Raspberry giggled, pulling Lemon Drop close. "Anniversary or not, I'll have him home by midnight."

"Midnight? But my curfew is…"

"Hate to break up the mush," Prism huffed, "but can we have our candy please?"

"Of course," Bon-Bon beamed.

She brought out an orange bowl and dropped candy in the bags. After receiving a smile from Jewel, Bon-Bon put extra in Gemstone's sack. Raspberry took a gumball out of her bag and handed it to

Lemon Drop.

"Happy Anniversary, sweetie."

"Awwww!" Lyra sighed.

"See?" Bon-Bon said, darting her eyes at her wife. " *She* remembers anniversaries."

The green unicorn groaned. "One little slipup and you're labeled for life!"

" *Two* !"

"That second one doesn't count! Who's ever heard of a hoof-holding anniversary?!"

"It happens to be one of the most memorable moments of my life!"

"It would be a lot more memorable if we held hands, not hooves!"

"Ugh! You and your obsession with hands!"

The Crusaders had been watching the quarrel in awkwardness, their heads turning from one mare to the other.

"Trust me, this could take a while," Lemon Drop whispered. "Just back away slowly."

The fillies nodded and did just that.

"Hands can be useful!" Lyra argued. "How else could you pick up something small like a nail or a pin?!"

Bon-Bon smacked her forehead. "That's what your *horn* is for!"

"Well, what if I wasn't a unicorn like you?!"

"I happen to manage fine on my own! Why must you be so childish?!"

When they were out of earshot, Cherry whispered to the others, "If I didn't know they were married, I'd say they *were* married."

That got a chuckle out of Lemon Drop.

Spike opened the door and jumped back when the trick-or-treaters shouted their chant:

"NIGHTMARE NIGHT! WHAT A FRIGHT! GIVE US SOMETHING SWEET TO BITE!"

The dragon clutched his heart and breathed. "Oh, that always gets me. Hey, great costumes, guys! Big Power Ponies fan!"

His eyes fell upon Jewel's Humdrum costume and he stiffened. Gemstone glanced between them.

"Are you alright, Uncle Spike?"

He shook his head. "Sorry. Flashback." He grinned. "Who wants candy?"

"Me, me, me, me, me!" the foals pleaded.

Spike brought out a tray of caramel apples. The Crusaders each grabbed one before he could hand them out.

"Is Applespike here?" Gemstone asked as she bit into her apple. "I'm sure Jewel would love to see him."

"He's over at Discord's," Spike replied, "playing with Zany. The others are at the festival. A few more trick-or-treaters and I'm joining them." He bent down and tickled the infant's chin. "Happy Nightmare Night, Little Jewel!"

As they departed from Sweet Apple Acres, the Crusaders examined their candy bags.

"Wow, look at this hoard!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"I think we hit the jackpot!" Cherry chimed.

"Where are we going next?" Lemon Drop asked. "The Party

Palace?"

"I wouldn't bother," Raspberry replied. "Mom and Dad are having their own candy-hunting spree."

"Aren't they a little old for that?"

The Tri-Pies gasped. "TOO OLD FOR FREE CANDY?!"

Lemon Drop shook his head. "Of course. But how come you guys don't trick-or-treat together?"

"Believe us," Blueberry whispered. "Mom and Dad's way is even messier."

"Huh?"

"Just trust us on this one," Raspberry warned.

He blinked. "On second thought, I don't wanna know. What about your place, Prism?"

"You have to fly to get up," Prism answered. "Besides, no pony's home. Aunt Scootaloo's playing at the festival and the twins are out pranking every pony."

"Our next stop's in there!" Cherry pointed.

Lemon Drop looked in front of them and gulped at the forest of tall, dark trees.

"Isn't that…the Everfree Forest?"

"Yup!" the fillies said casually.

"But I thought we weren't supposed to go in there!"

"This is the way to Uncle Discord's castle," Blueberry explained.

"Through the forest?!"

"Watch," Raspberry smirked. "Who wants to do it?"

"It's my turn, it's my turn!" Cherry chimed.

She stepped up to the edge of the Everfree, stood on her hind legs and spread out her front hooves.

"Oh great and ancient forces of Chaos, show us the path that shall lead us through! Cotton candy and chocolate of rainstorm and snow, take us to the Castle of Sisters Two!"

Prism rolled her eyes. "Just say the words, Cherry!"

"Oh," Cherry piped, returning to all fours. "We'd like to visit Discord, please."

Lemon Drop gasped as a glowing white path appeared and slithered through the trees.

"What the…?"

"Uncle Discord made that so ponies could make it to his castle safely," Raspberry explained. "Nothing can hurt us as long as we stay on the path."

"But how does he…?"

"Oh, that's right! You haven't met Uncle Discord yet, have you?"

"I've heard about him in school, but…no?"

"You'll love him!" Prism insisted. "He's great!"

"Just don't talk to him about Santa Hooves," Raspberry warned.

"Why?" Lemon Drop asked.

"Again, just trust me."

It was bad enough that things were howling and growling through the trees. The sight of the tall dark castle did not make Lemon Drop feel any less queasy. Lightning flashed, followed by the sound of a mare screaming. The colt ducked behind his girlfriend.

"We're not going in there, are we?" he stuttered.

"Don't be such a scaredy pony," Cherry huffed. "It's just the Castle of Chaos."

"That doesn't make it better!"

"Aw, don't you worry your cute little head, my little Lemony Drop," Raspberry cooed, cradling his head. "I'll make sure no big bad monsters rip you apart and eat you."

"Ooh!" Blueberry exclaimed, looking up at the big iron gate. "I love the new entrance!"

She pushed it open with a creak.

"I'm outta here!" Lemon Drop insisted.

Raspberry grabbed the collar of his jumpsuit and glared at him. "You're coming in with us whether you like it or not!"

The colt nodded hastily. He didn't know which was scarier: the castle or his girlfriend.

The Crusaders bravely walked through the gate. Jewel let out a whimper, but calmed down when Gemstone put a hoof on her. The courtyard was covered in gravestones, a thin layer of fog surrounding them.

"Cemetery," Blueberry piped. "Nice."

"The stones even have cool death words on them!" Cherry chimed. "Check this one out!" She squinted at a small headstone and read the epitaph: " *Turn around.* "

The foals turned and screeched. Standing there was a tall, green zombie pony with long gray hair, lazy red eyes and a long white tongue dangling from its mouth. They back away in fear. Lemon Drop yelped when something grabbed his hoof. He looked down and saw a rotting claw pulling him into the ground!

"I'll save you!" Raspberry declared as she tugged on her boyfriend.

The zombie pony in front of them was getting nearer, moaning in despair. Gemstone moved protectively in front of her baby sister.

"You shall not touch her!"

Two more creatures popped up from the ground. Gemstone shrieked as her eyes beheld two gremlins with spiral red eyes. They opened their mouths and cackled, revealing their pointy white teeth.

Blueberry, Cherry and Prism made a break for the castle, but two more zombies crawled out of their graves and blocked their path. They were forced to return to their friends.

Raspberry managed to pry Lemon Drop free, but the claw was still clutched to his hoof, nothing attached to it. He shook it off and as it hit the ground, a tall, dark creature rose up from the grave. Lemon Drop couldn't see it clearly in the dark, but he was sure the thing had horns. It crouched down and picked up the claw, reattaching it to its arm. Then it opened its glowing red eyes.

The creatures closed in on the foals. Lemon Drop was clinging to Raspberry, shivering in pure terror.

"I want my mommies!" he cried.

The tallest monster reached his claw out to him and snarled. When its face was just inches away, it whispered:

"Gotcha."

The monsters recoiled and shouted: "HAPPY NIGHTMARE NIGHT!"

"Huh?" Lemon Drop uttered.

The fillies and creatures burst out laughing. Then the tallest monster snapped its fingers and the graveyard lit up. The two gremlins changed to reveal two foals: a gray one with spiral red eyes and an orange one with reptilian eyes and a tail. One of the zombies took off its head to show the head of a yellow mare with a smooth pink mane. The one next to her disappeared in a flash of light and was replaced with a pink pony with spiral purple eyes and swirly purple and white hair. In a flurry of green flames, the first zombie turned

into a changeling, which made Lemon Drop yelp.

He looked up at the monster that had grabbed him, which was a combination of many different animals. He was holding the middle of his serpentine body as he laughed.

"Oh, I *love* this holiday!"

"Um, aren't you gonna change too?" Lemon Drop stammered.

"Huh?" the creature said, looking down at him. "Oh no, this is how I normally look."

"Good one, Uncle Discord!" Prism exclaimed, giving the monster a hoof bump.

"You sure had us scared!" Cherry chimed.

"Night of the living dead!" Blueberry nodded. "Impressive!"

"Though I think you overdid it on Lemon Drop," Raspberry said, pointing to the shivering colt.

"Sorry, my boy," Discord said, patting the youngster on the head. "Didn't mean to shake you up too much."

Introductions were made and Lemon Drop's fear diminished, though the sight of Discord was still disconcerting.

"Okay, no more tricks," Screwball said as a bowl of candy appeared in her hooves. "Time for the treats!"

"One more time, just so I've got this straight," Lemon Drop said as he and the fillies walked down the safe path. "That pegasus, Fluttershy, is married to that…Discord, that Screwy pony is their daughter, that changeling is her boyfriend, the baby with the red swirly eyes is her baby brother and that dragon-pony baby is his friend."

Raspberry nodded. "Yup, that's pretty much it."

He stared at her for a moment and then shrugged. "Why not? I have two moms."

"Oh boy!" Cherry chimed as she rummaged through her candy sack. "Can you believe all this candy? See? This is why Uncle Discord is the best!"

"Did he have to be so scary though?" Lemon Drop whined. "I nearly peed in my jumpsuit!"

"Calm down, sweetie, that was the last house," Raspberry assured him. "Now we're off to the festival. Look, we're almost out of the forest."

He sighed in relief. "Oh, thank goodness!"

"Ouch!" Cherry cried. "Hey! How'd this jewel get in here?"

Gemstone stopped in her tracks. "Jewel?"

She hadn't heard her sister whine or coo in a while, and the buggy suddenly seemed lighter. She peered over the rim and gasped. It was empty.

"Jewel!" she screamed. "Girls! Jewel is gone!"

The Crusaders let out equal gasps when they saw the vacant stroller.

"Oh no!" Gemstone exclaimed. "Oh no, oh no, oh no! Where is she?! If I don't find her soon…"

Blueberry interrupted her with a thought, "You don't think…?"

They turned their heads in the direction they had come, into the pitch blackness of the Everfree Forest.

"Oh no!" Gemstone said again. "We have to find her! She could get eaten by a Timberwolf, or a manticore, or a lion, tiger, or bear!"

"Oh my!" Cherry chimed.

"Oh, Mum's going to kill me! I promised I'd take care of her and…"

She trailed off as she started hyperventilating. Prism patted her on the back.

"Don't worry. We'll find her."

"How?!" Gemstone wheezed. "She could be anywhere by now!"

"Look, we'll just go back to the castle. Discord can use a spell that will…"

"There's no time! We have to find her *now* !"

"Ooh!" Blueberry piped. "This looks like a job for…"

She ripped off her Masked Matter-Horn costume and was now wearing a simple, tan dress with a white collar and a tan hairband in her hair. She pulled out a magnifying glass.

"Nancy Horseshoe!"

"Have you been wearing that the whole time?" Lemon Drop questioned.

Blueberry ignored his question and looked at the carriage through her magnifying glass.

"Uh huh," she muttered, moving her glass towards the ground. "Mmm hmm." She walked around the stroller. "Interesting." She moved down the path. "Uh huh."

"Have you found her trail?" Gemstone beseeched.

"Nope, but I love the way this road glitters! Oh, wait! Yes, I've got it!" Blueberry stood up and pointed in a direction away from the path. "She went this way!"

"How do you know?" Prism inquired.

"She's up in that tree right there."

Gemstone's eyes followed Blueberry's hoof. Sure enough, her sister

was sitting high in a tree.

"Oh goodness!" Gemstone shrieked. "How did she even…? Hang on, Jewel! I'm coming!"

She stepped off the path and raced towards the infant. Jewel seemed unafraid of her current predicament. She was rocking and laughing at how high up she was.

"Don't move!" her sister called. "I'm almost…" she skidded to a halt, "there."

Jewel had vanished, but Gemstone could still hear her laughter echoing throughout the wood.

"There she is!" Raspberry announced, pointing to another tree. "I'll get her!"

She wrapped her hooves around the trunk to climb it but as soon as she did, Jewel disappeared again.

"She's there!" Prism exclaimed.

"No, she's there!" Lemon Drop argued.

"No, she's up here!" Cherry cried. "Cherry Bomb!"

She bounced up towards the baby, but she was gone before Cherry could reach her.

Gemstone heard the laughter again and looked up to see Jewel back in the first tree.

"Stay right there!" she commanded. "Girls, Lemon Drop, help me up!"

The Crusaders made a pyramid, with the Tri-Pies on the bottom and Prism and Lemon Drop in the middle. Gemstone used the tree for support as she balanced on her hind legs. She reached her hoof up to her sister.

"Almost…there…"

As soon as she touched her, her fur turned cold. Gemstone looked up in horror as her baby sister had been replaced with the skeleton of a foal. She screamed and fell backward, causing the pyramid to collapse.

"What in Equestria?!" Gemstone hollered.

They grew silent as they heard snickering. They wriggled out of their pile to follow the sound. It was coming from behind the tree. They circled it and found Zany, Applespike and Jewel giggling uncontrollably.

"Oh," Prism groaned, looking up to the sky. "Ha-ha, Uncle Discord! You really got us! Now come out!"

The infants glanced at the older foals and continued laughing. Theirs was the only sound to be heard. Prism blinked in confusion.

"Screwball? Mothball? Aunt Fluttershy?" No answer. "Any pony?"

"You don't think…?" Raspberry said.

They all stared back at the giggling foals. They were pointing up at them, as if mocking them, and falling over at the force of their laughs.

"Did we just get pranked by a couple of babies?" Lemon Drop wondered.

Prism patted him on the back. "You'll get used to it."

Gemstone narrowed her eyes and approached the infants. Jewel paused when she saw the angry glare her sister was giving her. Applespike stopped laughing too, not liking how the pretty unicorn was looking at him. Zany glanced at them in confusion and then turned to Gemstone. Even he melted under her stare.

"Do you have any idea how worried I was?!" Gemstone exclaimed, talking specifically to her sister. "I thought you might've gotten eaten! What were you thinking? Sneaking off with these…these…chaotic twins?! Why, when Mummy hears about this, she'll…she'll…"

She trailed off when her sister started whimpering. The older filly softened. She looked so vulnerable, so innocent. Feeling guilty, Gemstone picked her up and smiled.

"It'll be our little secret," she said, rubbing her muzzle against her sister's cheek. "Just don't let it happen again."

"Good," Lemon Drop sighed. "Because I don't think any pony's going to believe us."

The Crusaders were on the path again, walking back to the Castle of Chaos. The three babies were all huddled together in the carriage.

"I think I'll leave Jewel with Uncle Discord," Gemstone declared. "At least until the festival is over. He'll make sure she doesn't sneak off again. Do you think Mum will understand?"

"She'll certainly be safer at the castle," Prism agreed. "By the way, nice job handling the babies back there. You make a great big sister."

The unicorn filly paused. "Hmm. I guess I do."

"Any pony who can make three troublemakers guilty certainly has skills."

"I just hope Mummy never leaves me alone with Jewel again!"

"Look," Lemon Drop said, "I know you told me Zany has freaky magic and all, but could three babies really do all that?"

"Trust me," Prism said, darting her eyes at the trio. "They're evil!"

Raspberry huffed. "No, they're not! Just look at them! So cute!"

They didn't know it, but the three babies were having a conversation in their own language.

"I told you they'd be mad!" Jewel exclaimed. "My sister's no fool!"

"You had to admit it was funny!" Zany argued.

"Did you see the looks on their faces?!" Applespike giggled. "Boy, I wish we could do that on *my* big brother and sister!"

"We could, you know?"

"No, sillies," said Jewel. "We can't do the same prank on them. That's just lazy." She grinned mischievously. "We should scare them with evil pears!"

Zany nodded his head in approval. "Jewel, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

All year I've been planning what I was going to do when Gemstone's sister arrived. Instead of the cliché kid-becomes-jealous-of-new-baby storyline, I decided to try something different, thinking back to when my baby brother arrived. It turned into a Halloween special. Not quite the way I expected, but fun to write.

Politically Incorrect

DISCLAIMER: Any political views seemingly expressed in here are for comedic purposes and are in no way to be taken seriously as most of them are dictated by ten-year-olds who have no idea what they're talking about.

Rarity was in the kitchen with her two daughters, using her magic to feed the younger while helping the elder with her homework, when her husband came in and slammed his hoof on the table.

"Every pony," Fancy Pants announced, "I'm running for Mayor!"

His family, including the baby, looked up at him in surprise.

"You're doing *what* ?!" Rarity exclaimed.

He raised an eyebrow. "You make it sound like I'm not cut out for being Mayor."

"No, no! You'd make an excellent Mayor, darling, just…why the sudden decision?"

"And what's wrong with being a stallion, Daddy?" Gemstone asked.

Rarity chuckled. "No. He means Mayor of Ponyville. But still, darling, why?"

"Well," Fancy Pants said, beginning his speech by pacing back and forth, "it has come to my attention that since we moved to Ponyville, I've been…how do I put this? Inactive. I haven't attended any races, auctions, gallery openings or dinner parties in the last year. All I've done is sit around the house, read the paper and do taxes. The only social interaction I get is with your friends and their families. As charming as they are, we don't find much to talk about.

"Meanwhile, you've been running this boutique all while nursing a

foal. While I love having all this time to spend with the fillies, I need to get out, have a career. Not for the money but for the principle. Now that the Mayor's term is ending, candidates are needed for the upcoming election. And then it occurred to me. I am now a citizen of Ponyville, I've resided here for over a year now, I have plenty of money, I minored in Political Science at Canterlot University, and I'm a good speaker. So why not be Mayor?"

"If you become Mayor, Daddy," Gemstone said, "does that mean you get to tell every pony what to do?"

Fancy Pants laughed and patted her head. "Not exactly, dear. It's the City Council that makes the local laws. I would just determine whether or not they should be made legal."

"Oh. But you'd still be the boss, wouldn't you?"

"In a sense, yes."

Gemstone brightened and flung her hooves around his neck. "Oh, Daddy, this is wonderful! Wait. If you're the Mayor, what would that make me?"

"Oh," Fancy Pants said, tapping his chin. "You'd be…you'd be the First Filly of Ponyville."

"Gah!" Jewel shouted angrily.

"Oh, very well," her father laughed, ruffling the foal's mane. "You *both* can be First Fillies."

"I think it's a splendid idea, darling," Rarity said, kissing him on the cheek. "And as your wife and campaign manager, I will support you all the way!"

Fancy Pants blinked. "Campaign manager?"

"But of course! You didn't think I was going to let you handle the campaign all by yourself, did you?"

"Darling, I…"

"Alright. The first thing we need to do is get you a new suit. Honestly, dear, you've been wearing the same style for years! Then we need to make posters. We need a slogan! Let's see. Then there's the issues that need to be addressed, the debate, the campaign party…"

She continued to say her thoughts aloud as she walked out of the kitchen, leaving Fancy Pants with a worried look on his face.

"What just happened?"

"I just figured out the answer to Number Four," Gemstone said, making a mark on her paper. "Oh, and Mummy's your new campaign manager. Good luck with that."

"What does it say?" Gemstone asked Prism as they were putting up campaign posters the next week.

" *Don't Be Chancy,* " Prism read. " *Vote for Fancy.* "

"What does 'chancy' mean?"

"Heck if I know. Your mom wrote it."

"Oh, I'm so proud of Daddy," Gemstone said as she stuck another poster to the wall. "He was the most important pony in all of Canterlot and now he'll be the most important pony in Ponyville too!"

"It's cool that your dad's running for Mayor. I thought he was too much of a stiff to work." Prism shrank from under the unicorn's scowl. "Well I was wrong, clearly. What's he gonna do when he's Mayor, anyway?"

"Daddy said he's going to increase spending on education. I think that means he's giving more money to the school."

"Huh. We could use new art supplies. The crayons are down to their tips."

"He also said he was going to give money to the hospital. They need

better equipment. Then there was something about taxes so they could afford all this. No idea what that means."

"Sounds like your dad has it all planned out. And just think, I'm gonna be the Mayor's daughter's best friend!"

The two jumped as a bright yellow poster was suddenly pasted next to their dark blue one. Gemstone couldn't make out the words, so Prism read them aloud for her:

" *Vote for Cheese. You'll Be Pleased* ?"

"Hey, you guys!" Cherry chimed as she and her sisters smoothed out the corners of their poster. "What you doing?"

Gemstone blinked as she stared at the picture of Cheese Sandwich. "Um…putting up posters for my daddy's campaign for Mayor?"

"What a coincidence!" Blueberry exclaimed. "We're doing the same thing!"

"We're passing out buttons too!" Raspberry piped. "Show them, Lemon Drop!"

The unicorn colt walked around the Tri-Pies. Around his neck was a tray of orange buttons with a picture of a chunk of cheese.

"Made them myself," Lemon Drop said, levitating one out of the tray.

"Hold on a second!" Prism exclaimed, looking bewilderedly at the Tri-Pies. " *Your* dad is running for *Mayor* ?"

"Sure!" Blueberry replied. "Why not?"

"There was a spot open," Raspberry explained, "and there are so many rules that Daddy doesn't agree with."

"Like the lack of unicycle lanes!" Cherry chimed. "I mean how can you avoid crashing into ponies with your unicycle when there are no unicycle lanes?"

"Your parents are the only ones in town who ride unicycles!"

Gemstone protested.

"No!" Raspberry insisted. "They're teaching us! And Lemon Drop!"

Prism raised an eyebrow at the colt. "Why?"

He was about to answer when Raspberry ruffled his mane and said, "What good is a coltfriend if he can't ride a unicycle?"

"Daddy's also going to make more holidays," Blueberry declared, "so we can have more days off from school and have more parties!"

"But," Gemstone stammered. " *My* daddy's going to be Mayor!"

"Nuh-uh!" Cherry said, shaking her head. " *Our* daddy's gonna be Mayor!"

"What makes you so sure?"

"Every pony *loves* Daddy," Blueberry claimed. "He's a lovable pony who every pony gets along with."

"And no offense, Gem," Raspberry piped, "your dad is nice and all but he's kinda boring."

The unicorn filly gasped and scowled. "How *dare* you?!"

Cherry shrugged. "He kinda is."

"Really? Well…well…your father's an out-of-control party animal who doesn't take anything seriously!"

"Hey!" the Tri-Pies shouted angrily.

"Daddy takes a *lot* of things seriously!" Blueberry insisted.

"Name three!" Gemstone dared.

"Family!"

"Friendship!" said Raspberry.

"And parties!" Cherry added.

"Well!" Gemstone huffed. " *My* father is a respectable colt and actually knows a thing or two about politics!"

"Uh-huh," Blueberry said, crossing her hooves. "And what are those things?"

The unicorn paused. "I don't know! He at least knows more than your father does!"

"At least *our* dad knows how to read!"

Gemstone, Lemon Drop and Prism gasped, while Raspberry and Cherry let out an "Oooooh!"

"Okay, guys, that's enough!" Prism declared.

"Yeah, there's no use fighting over this," Lemon Drop agreed. "After all, your *dads* are competing against each other, not you."

"Let the grown-ups decide who's better suited for Mayor."

The Tri-Pies looked apologetically at Gemstone.

"They're right," Blueberry said. "Which is why *we're* gonna get more voters than *you* !"

Gemstone narrowed her eyes. "Oh, I don't think so! *My* daddy's campaign is going to be so spectacular that the only vote *your* daddy will get is one!"

"Why you…wait. Why only one?"

"Even *I* know your mother would never vote against her husband."

Blueberry charged for her, but her sisters held her back.

"Save your energy for the election, Blue," Raspberry growled.

"Yeah, we'll get her in time," Cherry said, gritting her teeth.

"We'll see about that!" Gemstone exclaimed, grabbing Prism. "Come on, Prism! Let's make some more posters!"

"You can't even write!" Blueberry spat.

"Why do you think I have Prism?!"

"Well, you may have her, but we got Lemon Drop!" Raspberry hollered, snatching her boyfriend. "Come on, honey bunch! We need more buttons!"

As the two teams stormed off in opposite directions, the Tri-Pies turned their heads and stuck out their tongues. Although it was unladylike, Gemstone did the same.

"We'll show them," the four of them grumbled.

A few hours later, Gemstone walked back into town with a skip in her step. Prism was slowly coming up behind her, balancing a tower of posters.

"Uh, Gem?" the pegasus uttered as she attempted to look at her friend. "Isn't this a bit much?"

"But of course not!" the unicorn bubbled. "We need to be able to cover the whole town with pictures of Daddy! That'll show those Tri-Pies!"

"You know you've got that magic, right? Couldn't you have carried…?"

Gemstone suddenly stopped with a dramatic gasp. Prism crashed into her and fell backward. She groaned at the unicorn, but she seemed unfazed by the paper storm.

"A warning would've been nice!" the pegasus exclaimed.

Gemstone pointed to the wall of City Hall. "Look!"

On one of their posters, Fancy Pants' lip was decorated in a large, black moustache, and his eyes were framed in black circles.

"Look what they've done to my father!" Gemstone squealed.

"They've disgraced him with that horrid moustache and glasses!"

Prism stood up and raised an eyebrow. "Doesn't he already have a moustache and that monocle thing?"

"Yes, but this makes him look ridiculous!" The unicorn huffed like a bull that'd just laid eyes on a fluttering cape. "Oh, it is *on* ! Quick, Prism! Run home and get every black marker you own!" She smiled mischievously. "We're going to beat those Tri-Pies at their own game!"

The Tri-Pies growled up at the only poster of their dad that wasn't under Fancy Pants' face. Lemon Drop walked up to them and jumped when he saw where their anger was directed.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed. "Who did this?"

"Who do you *think* ?!" Raspberry grunted.

"That little brat is copycatting us!" Cherry hollered.

"And look at what she wrote over the slogan!"

The colt's eyes widened. "Ooh. Where'd she learn *that* word?"

"What does it even mean?" Raspberry wondered.

Blueberry whispered in her ear and steam came out of Raspberry's nostrils.

"Oh no, she didn't!"

"But wait," Cherry said. "I though she couldn't write."

"Clearly she got Prism to help her," Blueberry huffed. "The villainess! Taking our oldest friend to the dark side!"

"We should draw bunny ears on her dad!"

"No! If we keep sabotaging posters like this, we'll just be painting the town black!" Blueberry rubbed her chin. "We gotta concentrate on

gaining sympathy from the voters."

"Vote for my daddy, *pwease* ?" Blueberry sweetly asked as she held out a button.

Her lip was curled into a puppy-dog pout and her eyes were wide and glassy. The stallion she was pleading was putty in her hooves.

"Aw, how cute!" he said, taking the button. "Sure I'll vote for your dad, little filly!"

He lightly patted her head before departing. Blueberry grinned impishly as she glanced at her sisters.

"I just gave out ten buttons!" Cherry chimed.

"I gave out twelve!" Raspberry piped.

"What I tell ya?" Blueberry snickered. "Nothing can outmatch our atomic cuteness!"

Lemon Drop tapped on her shoulder. "I wouldn't be too sure of that."

He pointed across the street at Gemstone, who was talking to a unicorn mare.

"Vote for our daddy, Miss?"

The filly held out her sister Jewel, who cooed happily.

"Aw, aren't you just the cutest things?" the mare said.

"Daddy takes good care of us," Gemstone added, "all while running his campaign."

"And yet he still makes time for family?"

"That's our Daddy, a family stallion."

"Gah!" Jewel exclaimed.

"Well," the mare said while levitating a button out of Gemstone's tray, "he's got my vote."

Gemstone smiled sweetly. "Thank you ever so much, Miss!"

When the mare turned her back, Gemstone smirked at the Tri-Pies and stuck out her tongue.

"Ooh!" Blueberry grunted. "Curse the unbeatable cuteness of babies!"

"That's it!" Raspberry exclaimed. "Cherry, get a pacifier, diaper and baby bonnet big enough for Lemon Drop!"

"What?!" Lemon Drop shrieked.

"No, wait!" Cherry said as she rubbed her hooves together. "I've got a better idea."

"Muffins!" Cherry called in the streets the next day. "Get your muffins! Vote for Cheese Sandwich! A vote for Cheese is a vote for muffins!"

"Ooh!" Derpy exclaimed, zipping over to the Tri-Pies. "You got my vote!"

Gemstone growled as she watched ponies flock towards the triplets and their muffin trays.

"They think they're so clever! Well, they won't win an election by giving ponies cavities! Am I right, Prism?"

She turned to her friend and gasped when she saw her chewing on a blueberry muffin. Gemstone scowled, which made Prism stiffen.

"What?" she said with her mouth full.

Gemstone slapped her on the back, making her spit out the muffin.

"Don't encourage the enemy!"

"It's just a muffin!" Prism exclaimed. "Not like my vote counts anyway."

"We need to do better than them! To the kitchen!"

"Gem, we can't bake."

"You're right." The unicorn tapped her chin. "We'll have to think something else that will lure in the voters."

"My, what lovely bracelets!" a pegasus mare said as she peered in Gemstone's tray.

"Made them myself!" the unicorn filly said proudly. "They're for my daddy's mayor campaign! See? They spell 'Fancy Pants' in letter beads! Want one?"

"Absolutely!"

"So you'll vote for my daddy?"

"I'll consider it."

The mare took one of the bracelets and left. Gemstone turned to Prism excitedly.

"That's the third one today! We're on our way here, Prism!"

"I've gotta hand it to ya, Gem," the pegasus said. "These bracelets are pretty sweet."

"There's no way the Tri-Pies can beat us now!"

They turned with a start at the sound of a trombone. Their jaws dropped as the Tri-Pies paraded down the street, each playing a number of instruments. Cherry blew a trombone while bouncing on her back legs, resulting in the cymbals tied to her back hooves to clang together and the accordion on her head to stretch and collapse with each bounce. Blueberry had a bass drum strapped to her back as her lips alternated between a trumpet and a flute.

Raspberry had a large sousaphone, which she tooted as her tail shook a maraca. Behind them, Lemon Drop levitated a large banner that read: *Vote Cheese Sandwich for Mayor* .

"Now that's sure to get attention," Prism commented.

"Ooh!" Gemstone grunted. "It's not fair! It's four against two!"

"Well, you can't expect Lemon Drop to go against his girlfriend's dad."

"We don't need to turn Lemon Drop to our side. We just need reinforcements." She smiled wickedly. "And I know exactly where to get them."

"Think the voters will go for our cookies?" Raspberry asked the next day.

"How could they not?" Cherry said as she held one up. "They're shaped like Daddy's head!"

"Besides, they already loved our muffins," said Blueberry. "The quickest way to a pony's vote is through their sweet tooth!"

Lemon Drop stopped in his tracks. "Uh, guys? I think some pony beat us to the punch."

The Tri-Pies gaped at the scene before them. Several colts from their class were marching around with signs telling ponies to vote for Fancy Pants.

"Don't be chancy!" they chanted. "Vote for Fancy!"

"How in the world…?" Blueberry started to say.

Gemstone then appeared, a flirtatious look in her eye. "Keep it up, boys, and afterwards, you can all treat me to a milkshake at Sugar Cube Corner."

"Anything for you, Gem," Dunkin said dreamily.

The unicorn glanced at the Tri-Pies and winked.

"She's finally done it," Cherry grumbled. "Used her bedazzling good looks for evil!"

"Well," Blueberry snorted, "four can play at that game!"

"Five, even!" Raspberry exclaimed. "Lemony, quick! Get that filly over there to come to our side!"

"What?" Lemon Drop uttered. "I'm not flirting with other girls for your benefit!"

Raspberry grinned. "Aw, you're so sweet, Lemony." She scowled. "Quit it!"

"Look!" Cherry pointed. "Kicks and Pin Cushion haven't joined them yet!"

The Tri-Pies zipped up to the two colts, alarming them. The triplets batted their eyes and flipped their manes.

"Hiiiiiii, booooys!" they said slowly and sweetly.

Kicks rolled his eyes. "What do you want?"

The triplets grunted.

"Okay, here's the deal," Blueberry whispered. "We need you guys to help with our dad's campaign."

"What's in it for us?" Pin Cushion asked, crossing his hooves.

Blueberry leaned closer to Kicks. "Remember those little snapshots I showed you a while ago?"

"Uh-uh!" Kicks declared. "No way are you loonies bluemailing me again!"

"Again?" Pin Cushion asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Very well," Blueberry said calmly. "Pin Cushion, if you join us," she pushed her red sister forward, "Cherry will go out with you."

"Really?!" the brown unicorn exclaimed excitedly.

"Really?" Cherry cringed.

"He's been crushing on you for months," Blueberry whispered. "Just go with it."

"But I don't even like him."

"You want Daddy to win, or not?"

Cherry grinned nervously at Pin Cushion. "Pick me up at seven?"

When Gemstone saw what the Tri-Pies were up to, she elbowed Prism.

"They're trying to corrupt Kicks and Pin Cushion! Stop them!"

"Why me?" Prism groaned as she massaged her side. "You're the one with the charms."

"Use your own powers of persuasion! Your hooves!"

Prism rolled her eyes as she trotted over to the colts.

"I'll go to the *Foal-Free Press* !" Blueberry threatened Kicks.

"I don't care what you do!" the pegasus colt said firmly. "I'm not getting tangled up in your dirty work again!"

"Join our campaign or I'll pumble ya!" Prism exclaimed, raising her hoof.

Kicks smirked as he turned away. " *Your* threats won't do anything either."

She threw her hoof over his shoulder and pulled him close. "Look, if you help us out, you can buy me a shake later."

Kicks grinned as he followed Prism to the rally.

"See ya, losers!" he called to the Tri-Pies.

Raspberry, Cherry and Pin Cushion gaped in surprise while Blueberry narrowed her eyes.

"Okay, no more fluffy stuff. Cherry!" She held out her hoof. "Megaphone me!"

Cherry pulled a megaphone out of her mane and handed it to her sister. Blueberry cleared a nearby soapbox and stepped up.

"Citizens of Ponyville!" she said through the megaphone.

Several ponies turned their attention to the blue filly.

"Look around you! Look at how dull and unpredictable your lives are! What, with your jobs, your responsibilities, you could be doing so much more, if only your government would allow you to! Do you want freedom?"

"Yes!" a few ponies shouted.

"Do you want excitement?"

"Yes!" some others chimed in.

"Do you want fun?"

"Yes!"

"Do you want Cheese Sandwich?"

The crowd murmured amongst themselves.

"Uh," one stallion responded, raising his hoof, "I'm lactose intolerant!"

"No!" Blueberry said, holding up a poster of her father. "I meant my dad, Cheese Sandwich, for Mayor!"

Gemstone scowled and held her hoof towards her friend. "Prism! Megaphone me!"

"What, you think I carry a megaphone around with me wherever I go?" Prism replied.

"Uh," Jelly Legs squeaked, slowly lifting his hoof. "I have one."

"Thank you, Jelly Legs," Gemstone smiled as she swiped the megaphone from his hoof. "Kicks, Dunkin, hoist me up!"

The two colts crouched down in front of her. Gemstone lightly stepped onto their backs and they lifted her up.

"Every pony!" she said through her megaphone. "Would you elect an out-of-control party animal who went under a different name for ten years? Or a respectable, reliable, noble stallion who is actually serious enough to be Mayor?"

Blueberry rolled her eyes. "Reliable, huh? Didn't your parents have a falling out last year because your dad was seeing some pony else?"

"You know very well that that was a misunderstanding! At least my father didn't lie about who he was!"

"Dad was running away from his ex-girlfriend!"

"Who was only trying to give back his scarf!" Gemstone smiled at the crowd. "If you elect my daddy, you'll be getting more money for schools and hospitals!"

"Ooh," some of the ponies uttered.

"Oh, yeah?" Blueberry grunted. "Well, if you elect *our* daddy, you'll be getting more holidays!"

"Ah," the crowd gasped.

"Well my daddy can actually handle the job!" Gemstone spat.

"Our dad is actually fun!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"My daddy minored in Political Science! Wasn't *your* daddy an elementary school drop-out?!"

The Tri-Pies gasped.

"What now?" Raspberry whispered.

"Move aside!" Cherry chimed, grabbing the megaphone. "This'll make 'em lose for sure!"

She lifted the megaphone to her mouth and hollered, "FANCY PANTS IS AGAINST GAY MARRIAGES!"

The crowd gasped in horror.

"What?!" Gemstone yelled. "No, he isn't!"

"Then why'd he cringe during Lyra and Bon-Bon's Welcome Back to Ponyville Party?" Cherry demanded.

"Because he'd just had your mother's lemon-lime-grapefruit punch!"

Blueberry took back the megaphone. "Would you have a mayor who can't even sign his own name?"

Gemstone put a hoof on her hip. "Oh, now you're discriminating against ponies with disabilities?!"

The crowd gasped again. A mother threw her hooves around a filly in a wheelchair.

"So you wanna play rough, huh?" Blueberry demanded. "Okay, then! Do you want a prim, pompous, pretentious pony for Mayor?"

"What'd she say?" Gemstone whispered to Prism.

"What do I look like?" Prism replied. "A dictionary?"

The unicorn looked desperately at her groupies. "Quick, does any pony know any big words I can use?"

"Uh…" Jelly Legs raised his hoof. "I might, uh…"

"Tell me!"

She leaned down as he whispered in her ear. Gemstone smiled and lifted the megaphone back up.

"Would you reduce this city to an anarchy?!"

"Oh, how typical of you conservative capitalists!" Blueberry retorted. "Just because we want a little leeway, you assume we're gonna crumble the country into chaos!"

"Give me some more big words!" Gemstone whispered to Jelly Legs.

After he gave her more suggestions, the unicorn's eyes blazed with fire.

"Socialist!" she called.

"Communist!" Blueberry countered.

"Fascist!"

"Republican!"

"Monocrat!"

"Federalist!"

"Oligarchy!"

"Any idea what they're talking about?" Raspberry murmured.

Cherry and Lemon Drop shrugged.

"Aristocrat!"

"Terrorist!"

"Tax collector!"

"ENOUGH!" two female voices shouted.

Every pony turned to the white unicorn and pink earth pony.

"Move along, folks!" Pinkie hollered. "Nothing to see here!"

"All of you!" Rarity commanded. "Shoo!"

Gemstone and the Tri-Pies ditched their megaphones and tried to

disappear into the crowd.

"Not so fast!" Rarity snapped.

The fillies turned around and smiled up awkwardly at their mothers.

"Now, Gemstone," Rarity said, crossing her hooves, "when I said you could help me with your father's campaign…"

"And when I said you three could go crazy…" Pinkie said to her daughters.

"This isn't what I meant!" the mares finished together.

"But they…" Gemstone said, pointing at the Tri-Pies.

"But she…" the triplets said, pointing at Gemstone.

"No buts!" their mothers shouted.

"When Pinkie and I heard our husbands were running against each other," Rarity continued, "we didn't think it would drive a wedge between you girls!"

"Yeah!" Pinkie nodded. "Rarity and I agreed to keep the competition friendly, but this, girls, is *not* friendly!"

"Where'd you even learn those words, anyway?"

"Books," Blueberry muttered.

"Jelly Legs," Gemstone whimpered.

"Name calling is not nice!" Pinkie scolded. "Especially when you use words you don't know the meaning of!"

"And you shouldn't let silly things like politics get in the way of your friendship!" Rarity said firmly. "This election is between your fathers and should in no way affect you girls at all! Understand?"

The girls hung their heads and groaned, "Yes."

"Good. Now, the big debate is tomorrow and it is important that you

girls be on your best behavior!"

"Yeah, so no more badmouthing each other!" Pinkie commanded.

"We won't," the four fillies grumbled.

"Pinkie Promise?"

"Cross our hearts and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in our eyes."

The mares looked at each other and grinned.

"Alright, girls, let's go home then," Pinkie said. "We've got a lot of baking to do for tomorrow!"

"And we have some signs to make, Gem," Rarity said, pushing her daughter in the opposite direction.

As the girls went their separate ways, Pin Cushion quickly caught up to Cherry.

"So, we still on for tonight?" he asked hopefully.

Cherry narrowed her eyes and pushed him away. "Get lost."

That night, at City Hall, two small figures cloaked in black bodysuits were creeping along the walls. A security guard came through the front door and started looking around with a flashlight. One figure pulled the other through the door before the guard could spot them. Inside, the stage was set up for tomorrow's debate with two podiums standing beside each other.

"Gem, I'm not so sure about this," Prism whispered.

"Don't be silly!" Gemstone exclaimed as she levitated something out of her black saddlebag. "We just have to put this slow-drying superglue on Cheese Sandwich's desk thing and when he puts his hooves down, he'll find himself in a sticky situation!"

"But you Pinkie Promised that you wouldn't…"

"That I wouldn't do any more badmouthing! I didn't say anything about sabotage!"

Meanwhile, backstage, four more foals dressed in black were digging through a bag.

"So you see," Blueberry finished explaining, "we won't be breaking any promises."

"I can't believe you guys talked me into this," Lemon Drop whispered. "What if we get caught?"

"We'll just say we were sleepwalking!" Cherry chimed.

"Dressed as ninjas and carrying…what is that stuff?"

Blueberry smiled as she pulled out a bundle of wires. "Just the equipment we need to ensure our victory. After a bit of rewiring, Fancy Pants' microphone will make him sound like a chipmunk!"

"And then the election will be mine!" Gemstone declared.

"Mine!"

At the same time, the two fillies let out dangerously evil laughs, which made Prism and Lemon Drop shrink in fear.

"Gem, you're really starting to scare me," Prism whimpered.

"I think you're taking this whole election way too seriously," Lemon Drop quivered.

"Come, Prism!" Gemstone said, trotting up to the stage. "We have work to do!"

"Come, sisters!" said Blueberry. "And Lemon Drop! We have mayhem to wreak!"

The triplets and Lemon Drop crawled up to Fancy Pants' podium while Gemstone and Prism approached Cheese Sandwich's. When the two teams caught sight of each other, they shrieked in surprise.

"What are you doing here?!" Gemstone demanded.

"Us?" Blueberry replied. "What about *you* ?!" She gasped when she noticed the superglue. "You're here to sabotage our dad's debate!"

The unicorn scowled at the pile of wires. "Apparently, so are you!"

"Who cares?! Our dad's gonna win no matter what it takes!"

"No mine is!"

"Ours!"

"Mine!"

"Ours!"

"Mine!"

"Ours!"

"Mine!"

The doors burst open and flashlights blinded the foals.

"What in Equestria is going on here?"

The voice belonged to Fancy Pants. When the flashlights were lowered, the foals could see that the other flashlight was held by Cheese Sandwich.

"What I tell ya?" he said as they approached the stage. "My Cheesy Sense was right on the bat!"

"Gemstone, what is the meaning of this?" Fancy Pants demanded.

"Girls, what's with the wires?"

"And why are Prism and Lemon Drop here?"

"It's not his fault, Daddy!" Raspberry insisted. "We made Lemon Drop come here!"

"And I asked Prism to come!" Gemstone added.

"But what are you all doing here in the first place?" Fancy Pants asked again.

Gemstone and the Tri-Pies looked down at their hooves.

"Well, uh…" Blueberry uttered.

"You see…" Gemstone murmured.

"No need!" Cheese Sandwich exclaimed. "I know what superglue and wires mean! You're trying to sabotage the debate!"

Fancy Pants put a hoof to his head. "Oh, Gemstone! Your mother told me you were going overboard with the campaign, but I didn't think it would be this bad!"

"And girls! What did I tell you about pranking ponies for evil?"

"Not to mention breaking and entering! And getting your friends involved in such foolishness?"

"Shame on you!"

The four fillies hung their heads.

"We're sorry, Dad," Blueberry said.

"I just wanted you to win, Daddy," Gemstone said apologetically.

"Oh, dear," Fancy Pants said, shaking his head. "I should've known us running against each other would cause friction between the children."

"Kids," said Cheese, "you know we both wanna be Mayor, but not through dirty tricks."

"Would you rather one of us win dishonestly?"

Their daughters shook their heads and replied, "No."

"That's right. We want a clean election."

"And no matter who wins," Cheese said, putting a hoof around Fancy, "we're not gonna let that get in the way of us being buddies, and neither should you."

"Now apologize."

"We're sorry," the four said.

The stallions crossed their hooves and said, "To each other."

Gemstone and the Tri-Pies looked at each other for a moment before moving into a group hug.

"Apologize to Prism and Lemon Drop too," Fancy demanded, "since you dragged them into this."

"Sorry, Prism," Gemstone said to her pegasus friend. "I guess I got a little carried away."

"Sorry, Lemony," Raspberry said. "I hope this doesn't mean we can't be boyfriend and girlfriend anymore."

Prism and Lemon Drop smiled.

"Ah, we forgive ya, guys," the pegasus said.

"Yeah," the colt nodded. "We love you guys no matter how crazy you get." He glanced at Raspberry. "Especially you, Razz."

Raspberry squealed as she squeezed her coltfriend. Gemstone did the same to Prism.

"Well," Cheese Sandwich grinned, "glad that that's all settled."

"Now let's all go home," Fancy Pants suggested. "Scootaloo and Lemon Drop's mothers are probably worried sick."

"Oh, by the way, you girls are grounded."

The unicorn stallion nodded. "Until the election is over."

Their daughters sighed. "Fair enough."

Several weeks later, the citizens of Ponyville waited outside City Hall in anticipation for the new Mayor to be announced. The candidates and their families stood in the front row.

"Good luck, old chap," Fancy Pants whispered to his opponent.

"You too," Cheese responded with a smile.

"No matter what happens, you were a worthy opponent."

"Ditto."

The door opened and Princess Twilight stepped out onto the terrace.

"Alright, every pony!" she announced. "The ballots have been counted! Would the candidates come up here, please?"

The crowd cheered as Fancy Pants and Cheese Sandwich stepped up to the alicorn's sides.

"It was a close race," Twilight said as she took each of the stallion's hooves, "but your new mayor is…"

A drumroll was played.

"It's gotta be your dad," Gemstone told the Tri-Pies.

"Nah, it's gotta be yours," Blueberry replied.

Then Twilight lifted the winner's hoof.

"Fancy Pants!"

Half the crowd erupted in applause.

"Yes!" Gemstone cheered, leaping in the air. "Yay, Daddy!"

The Tri-Pies momentarily hung their heads, but smiled at Gemstone.

"Congratulations, Gem," Blueberry said, shaking the unicorn's hoof.

Onstage, the candidates were shaking hooves too.

"I voted for you," Cheese whispered.

"And I, you," Fancy replied.

The unicorn was then tackled by his wife and daughters.

"I knew you'd win!" Rarity shouted excitedly. "I knew it, I knew it, I knew it!"

"Me too!" Gemstone squealed.

"Mah!" Jewel gurgled.

Pinkie and the triplets went to console Cheese.

"Sorry you didn't win, Dad," Raspberry said.

"It's okay, girls," Cheese said, giving his family a squeeze. "It's just as well. Fancy Pants knows a lot more about politics than me. Heck, I didn't even know what they were talking about when they asked me what I was going to do about the economic crisis! Besides, I already have the best job in the world."

"Running the party palace?" Pinkie asked.

"Nope. Looking after you girls."

"Awwwwww!" the Pie girls said as they moved to embrace the stallion again.

Prism and Lemon Drop looked on in approval.

"I think Uncle Fancy will make a good mayor," the pegasus said.

"I'm just glad every pony made up," said the colt. "Boy, I never wanna get mixed up in politics again!"

"How do you think it'll be when we're eighteen and we have to vote?"

They looked at each other and cringed.

"How about we avoid the chaos completely and not vote?" Lemon Drop suggested.

"Sounds good to me."

Scootaloo, who was standing nearby, rolled her eyes. "Yeah, sure. *That's* the lesson that needs to be learned here."

I did tell you guys these one-shots were only for when I was stuck on bigger stories.

Due to all the drama this month on 2016 elections, now seems the appropriate time to release this chapter, even though I started it in November. I actually came up with this idea due to me thinking that Fancy Pants should be doing something in Ponyville, and Mayor seemed like the best thing. I didn't want to go too much into detail of the actual election. I thought it'd be more entertaining to focus on the kids' perspectives. Plus, I don't know much about politics.

I'm not setting up a Cherry PiexPin Cushion ship. That was just for laughs.

Compromises

Hey, what do you know? A Lemon Drop chapter!

Lemon Drop rubbed his eyes as he awoke from his slumber. He glanced outside and gasped when he saw white. He pressed his face against the window to check if his suspicions were correct. Ponyville was covered in a fresh blanket of snow.

"Woo hoo!" the unicorn colt exclaimed as he jumped on his bed. "The first snow of my first winter in Ponyville! On a Saturday too!"

He gasped and came to a sudden halt. "I gotta go find Razz!"

He leaped to the floor and was about to rush out the door when he remembered he hadn't fed his mice yet. He went to the cage on the dresser, opened it, grabbed a small box and shook food pellets into the little dish. Two little white mice scrambled to it.

"There you go, Swiss and Gouda," he whispered. "Eat up."

He set the box down and closed the cage before returning to his earlier enthusiasm. He whizzed down the stairs and past the kitchen where Bon-Bon was cooking eggs and Lyra was reading the morning paper.

"Morning, Mom! Morning, Mom! Love you so much, bye-bye!" he called to them.

"Wait, what?" Lyra said, looking up from her paper.

"Lemon Drop?" Bon-Bon called, looking over her shoulder. "Where you off to in such a hurry?"

"It's the first snow of winter!" Lemon Drop replied as he got his hat, scarf and boots off the coat rack. "I'm going to Raspberry's so we can go play! She's been talking about our first winter together for

weeks! We're gonna make snow ponies, throw snowballs, ride that giant sled she won't stop talking about…"

"Whoa there, kiddo!" Lyra chuckled, putting a hoof on her son's shoulder. "It's nice that you're excited about the snow and all, but you're not going anywhere until you've had your breakfast."

"Aw, but Mom!" the colt whined. "Razz is waiting for me! And if I'm late, she'll yell at me!"

"Lyra's right, sweetie," Bon-Bon agreed as she slid the fried eggs onto a plate. "If you're going out in the cold, you're going to need something warm in your belly. Besides, it's early. I'll bet Raspberry hasn't even finished her breakfast yet."

"You don't know Razz," Lemon Drop grumbled as he joined his mothers at the table.

"Now, now. Don't give me that pout, mister. You can go as soon as you've finished your eggs."

The colt sighed as he picked up his fork and started eating.

"You seem to be looking forward to spending the day with Raspberry," Lyra noted.

"Sure!" Lemon Drop replied with his mouth full. "She's my girlfriend, isn't she?"

"Don't talk with your mouth full, honey," Bon-Bon said as she closed her son's jaw.

"I think it's really cute," Lyra giggled, "you having a girlfriend at this age. Why, I didn't have a significant other until I was seventeen." She sighed. "That only lasted two weeks though."

Lemon Drop tilted his head. "Then how did you and Mommy Bon-Bon get married?"

The mares laughed.

"Oh no, sweetie," Lyra explained. "I didn't know Bon-Bon then."

He blinked. "Huh?"

"My first relationship was with a stallion named Thunder Lane."

"Mine was with a stallion too," Bon-Bon smirked. "That was before I realized stallions weren't my thing, of course."

Lemon Drop blinked again. "I don't understand."

"What don't you understand, honey?"

"I thought you guys only dated one pony. Each other, I mean."

"Oh, not every pony marries their first love, kid," said Lyra.

"Although," Bon-Bon said thoughtfully, "I don't think I'd ever felt for any pony the way I felt for you."

The unicorn mare blushed. "Oh, stop."

Lemon Drop was still startled by this news. Nevertheless, he finished his eggs and hopped out of his seat.

"Okay, I'm done! Bye!"

He shut the door before his mothers could return the farewell.

"Is it just me," Bon-Bon asked, "or has he been perkier than usual lately?"

"Guess that little Raspberry's been rubbing off on him," Lyra said with a wink.

"Is he old enough to be having a girlfriend, though? That question's been nagging at me for months."

"Aw, let the kid have his fun. After all, they're kids. They're not likely to get serious for a long time."

When Lemon Drop reached the Party Palace, the other Cutie Mark Crusaders were already playing out front. Cherry was lying on the

ground making a snow angel, Prism and Gemstone were building a snow pony, and Blueberry and Raspberry were making snow pies. As soon as Raspberry caught sight of Lemon Drop, she whooshed up and tackled him onto his back.

"There you are!" she squealed. "What took you so long?"

"Sorry, I'm late," he apologized as he stood back up. "My moms had me eat breakfast."

"Aw, that's okay! Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, after all! Especially on an important day such as this!"

"I guess today is pretty important."

"Of course, it is! Hold on! I'll be right back!"

She zipped into the house before Lemon Drop could ask. He waited patiently for three seconds before she returned with a yellow gift box wrapped in white ribbon.

"For me?" he asked as he took the box in his hooves.

"Of course it's for you, silly! Now open it!"

He tore off the ribbon and lifted the lid of the box. Inside was a picture frame shaped like a snowflake. He levitated it with his magic and saw that it carried a poem.

"Read it aloud!" Raspberry insisted.

"Okay," Lemon Drop said as he read the poem:

" *To my sweet Lemony Drop.*

On this day we enjoy

Winter's greatest blessing,

But the greatest blessing

I could ever ask for

Is you!

Happy Anniversary,

Love… "

He stopped. "Anniversary?!"

"Of course!" Raspberry piped. "Surely you haven't forgotten our three-and-a-half-month anniversary!"

"Oh, uh…"

Her eyes widened. "You *did* , didn't you?!"

"I didn't forget! I just…didn't know we'd be celebrating today. Didn't we agree to stop celebrating our anniversary every day?"

"I'm *not* celebrating it every day! Just every fifteen days! Or sixteen, depending on the month. So…you don't have a gift for me?"

"You didn't tell me I had to bring one!"

"So I slave away over your gift and you have *nothing* for me?!"

"Should we do something?" Gemstone whispered to Prism.

"You kidding?" the pegasus replied. "I'm not getting in the middle of *that* !"

"Want some popcorn?" Cherry asked, holding a bag up to her friends.

"I'm sorry, Razz!" Lemon Drop exclaimed. "I didn't know! It…it's a really nice gift though."

Raspberry scowled at him for a while and then smiled brightly. "Aw, I can't stay mad at you, pookie! I forgive you for forgetting! The only gift I could really ask for is you!"

He choked as she flung her hooves around his neck. "Um…great?"

"Now come on! Let's have some winter fun!"

After an hour of playing in the snow, the Cutie Mark Crusaders were a little chilly. Unfortunately, since Pinkie Pie and Cheese Sandwich were off having winter fun of their own, they couldn't get hot chocolate from the Party Palace, so they agreed to get some at Sugar Cube Corner. They were having a wonderful time, until Pumpkin Cake came with the check.

"Oh, Lemon Drop," Raspberry said, fluttering her eyelashes. "Would you be a dear?"

"Oh no!" Lemon Drop said, holding up his hooves. "I paid last time!"

"Uh," Prism stammered, "we don't mind paying for our own…"

"How come I always gotta pay when we go somewhere?"

" *Because* ," Raspberry replied, "it's customary for the colt to pay for the date."

"Where does it say that?"

"In every romance novel I've read."

"Actually, we have enough bits to…" Gemstone started to say.

"Why can't *you* pay every once in a while?" Lemon Drop demanded. "I only get so many bits for allowance!"

"You could always split…" Blueberry said.

"It's the least you can do after forgetting our anniversary!" Raspberry shouted.

"How many anniversaries do we have to have?!" Lemon Drop demanded.

"I mean after everything I do for you, after all the effort I put into being a good girlfriend, the least you can do is pay for my hot chocolate! Sometimes I think I'm doing all the work in this relationship, that you don't appreciate me!"

"I *do* appreciate you, Razz!"

"Then how come we haven't kissed yet?!"

"Kiss?! Razz, we're only ten!"

"I'm *nine* , you buffoon! See? You can't even remember my age!"

"No, I meant…"

Raspberry snorted as she dropped some bits on the table. "Here! Keep the change!"

"Razz, I didn't…" Lemon Drop called as the magenta filly stomped out of the shop. "Could you just stop and listen for a moment?!"

"I'm not talking to you!" she snapped.

He watched as his marefriend raced through the snow. He hung his head in sadness and walked in the other direction. Back inside the shop, the rest of the Cutie Mark Crusaders stared at the open door in a daze.

"Maybe it's a good thing neither of us have coltfriends yet," Gemstone said.

"Or marefriends!" Cherry interjected.

"Okay, Cherry," Prism groaned, rolling her eyes. "We get it."

The red filly crossed her hooves. "Well, *excuse me* for being politically correct!"

Lyra and Bon-Bon didn't hear their son come in because they were at the piano. Every other Saturday, they would play their routine from the Ponyville Talent Show over twenty years ago.

" *I'm Lyra* ," Lyra sang as she and her partner played, " *she's Bon-Bon* ."

" *We wrote for you a little song-song,* " they sang together.

" *She's Lyra* ," Bon-Bon sang, " *I'm Bon-Bon* ."

Together: " *We promise it won't take so long-long* ."

" *We're two peas in a…* "

"Bon-Bon, you did it again!" Lyra interjected. "It's D *flat* , not D *sharp* !"

"Must we do this every time?" Bon-Bon said. "It's not like anyone's watching."

Lemon Drop let out a sigh. The mares turned to him in surprise.

"Oh, hey, kid," Lyra smiled. "How was the snow?"

The colt hung his head, which made the mares frown in concern.

"What's wrong?" Bon-Bon asked.

"Razz and I got into a fight," he mumbled.

The mares turned to each other and said, "Uh-oh."

"I knew this would happen eventually," Bon-Bon said.

Lyra scooted to the far end of the piano bench and patted the space between her and Bon-Bon. "Come up here, kid. Tell us what happened."

Lemon Drop joined his moms on the bench and let them each put a hoof on his shoulder.

"First she got mad at me for forgetting our three-and-a-half-month anniversary," he explained, "and I didn't even know we were celebrating it."

"Ooh, I can imagine how that went down," Lyra said.

"Yes," Bon-Bon glared, "since *you* forget anniversaries all the time!"

"Hey! We don't need to celebrate *everything* that ever happened to us! Isn't our wedding anniversary enough? And who cares what day

it was when we revealed each other's deepest, darkest secrets?"

"That was a major breakthrough in our relationship! It was the day I realized how much I trusted you as a friend and started developing feelings for you!"

Lemon Drop looked at them curiously. "Deepest darkest secrets?"

"I ate Bon-Bon's specially imported oats without telling her," Lyra explained.

"And you, Mommy Bon-Bon?"

"Uh…" Bon-Bon stammered.

"She's a secret agent," Lyra said quickly.

Bon-Bon shot her a glare.

Lemon Drop rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right."

"The point is, it doesn't matter *when* we got together," Lyra said. "It happened, didn't it? I at least remember the day we met and the day we confessed our feelings to each other."

Bon-Bon rubbed her chin. "Hey, how *did* we confess our feelings for each other?"

"Derpy locked us in a closet, remember?"

"Oh, yeah!"

"Guys," Lemon Drop groaned, "can we get back to my problem?"

"Oh, sorry."

"Anyway, Razz got me a gift and I didn't have anything for her. She forgave me, but then when we went to Sugar Cube Corner, she wanted me to pay *again* ."

"That's what's wrong with the ponies of today!" Lyra exclaimed. "They still rely on tradition!"

"Even the foals!" Bon-Bon huffed.

"If the guy pays all the time, not only might he go broke, but it makes the girl look like she's just there for the free food!"

"Why don't they just split the bill like we do? Or at least take turns?"

"That's what I said!" Lemon Drop exclaimed. "Then we yelled at each other, and she said I don't appreciate her and that she's doing all the work in our relationship. Now she's not talking to me."

He plopped his head onto the piano keys. His mothers patted him on the back.

"Is it over between us?" he grumbled.

"Do you *want* it to be over?" Bon-Bon asked.

Lemon Drop lifted his head. "No. I like Razz. I've had more fun with her than any pony else. She's the first friend I made in Ponyville, and she makes me laugh."

"Then what's the problem?" Lyra inquired.

"It's just…" He sighed. "Sometimes she can get a little…pushy. She tried to get me to learn how to ride a unicycle, you know. And she wants me to kiss her, but I'm not sure I'm ready for that."

"Why don't you tell her?"

"I don't want to hurt her feelings."

"Kid, we'll tell you a little secret. You know why fifty percent of marriages fail?"

Lemon Drop shook his head.

"It's because those couples never fight enough!"

"Huh?"

"You heard her," Bon-Bon said. "No pony likes arguing, but as long as it doesn't get out of hoof, it can actually be healthy in a

relationship."

"You see Bon-Bon and I argue every now and then," Lyra continued. "But does a little disagreement ever stop us from loving each other?"

"No," Lemon Drop replied.

"Exactly! You know why?"

"Because once we know what's bothering us," said Bon-Bon, "we find a way to fix it."

"But if we keep our feelings bottled up, we'll just keep getting miserable and the other will never know what's wrong."

The colt looked between his mothers. "So…you're saying I should tell Razz everything that's bugging me?"

"If you break it gently to her, yes," Bon-Bon replied.

"Maybe give her a make-up gift too," Lyra added, "just in case an apology isn't enough."

"Gee," Lemon Drop uttered. "Having a girlfriend is hard."

His mothers chuckled as he slid off the bench and went up to his room. Once he was gone, Bon-Bon darted her eyes at Lyra.

"You nearly blew my cover there!"

"Oh please," Lyra huffed. "I knew he wouldn't buy it."

"And what if he *did* ?"

"I'd tell him I was joking. Honestly, Bon-Bon. Have a little faith in me."

Bon-Bon sighed. "Just don't do it again, okay?"

Lyra surprised her with a peck on the lips. "Whatever you say, Sweetie."

"Help me, guys," Lemon Drop said to his mice as he dug through his room. "I gotta find something Razz will like. Hey!" He opened a scrapbook. "How about one of my rare, limited edition stamps?"

Swiss and Gouda gave him blank looks.

"Hmm, you're right. It should be something more personal. Ooh! How about my favorite sweater? That's personal! Oh, wait. Then she'll wear it all the time and do something weird like never wash it so it will always smell like me. It's gotta be something personal, but not too personal that she'll get creepy about it."

He picked up the framed poem Raspberry had given him earlier. "I wish I was as creative and thoughtful as Razz. I mean look at this. She wrote a poem and made a snowflake-shaped frame. Ugh, how is she able to express herself so easily? Now that I think about it, I've never even told her I liked her."

He tapped his chin. "Hey…that's it!"

The next day, Lemon Drop opened the door to meet Raspberry's bored gaze.

"Whatever you invited me over for, it better good. And I'm still not talking to you!"

"I wanted to show you something," he said, stepping aside, "in the living room."

"Okay," she sighed as she entered. "But I'm still not talking to you!"

He led her into the living room, where Lyra and Bon-Bon were sitting at the piano. He stood over by them and nodded. They began playing and to Raspberry's surprise, Lemon Drop opened his mouth to sing:

" *Razz, Razz, Razz,*

You fill my life with razzamatazz,

With excitement, with joy, with fun

And all that jazz. "

His voice was a little squeaky, yet it made Raspberry's heart quiver. He had never done anything like this before.

" *You can be kind of clingy* …"

She frowned.

" *But I like it when your hoof's in mine.*

You are sometimes too perky …"

She crossed her hooves.

" *But I like the way your smile shines* ."

She blushed and smiled slightly as he walked over to her.

" *I cannot rhyme like you,*

And I know this is long overdue,

But despite it all, Razz …"

She froze as he took her hoof and finished:

" *I really, really, like you,*

Too ."

Lyra and Bon-Bon stopped playing and there was silence. Raspberry did nothing but stare at the colt. Lemon Drop hung his head.

"I'm not really creative," he said. "Mommy Lyra and Mommy Bon-Bon helped me write that yesterday. I'm sorry about our fight. You should know I like you Razz, but sometimes…you kinda come on a bit strong. I know you want me to kiss you and be the perfect coltfriend and stuff, but I'm not ready for all that. I just wanna hang out with you, maybe hold your hoof every now and then. You think

we can do that?"

Raspberry smiled and threw her hooves around him. "Of course we can, my little Lemony Drop! I guess I was a bit pushy. The truth is, I'm just happy to have you as a coltfriend. You could've told me that I was making you uncomfortable sooner."

"I was scared you might not like me anymore."

"You shouldn't be scared of me! I'm your girlfriend, not your mother! No offense, Misses Lyra and Bon-Bon."

The mares shrugged it off.

"Anyway," Raspberry continued, "next time I do something you don't like, tell me, okay?"

Lemon Drop smiled and nodded. "Okay."

"And I'll try to be less clingy. From now on, our anniversary's only once a month."

"I think I can live with that."

"Now, what say we get some hot chocolate at Sugar Cube Corner? On me!"

"That's okay, Razz. You don't have to do that."

"Oh, but it's the least I can do! I can't have my boyfriend going broke because of me!"

"How about we split it, fifty-fifty?"

She held out her hoof. "Deal."

They shook hooves and then locked forelegs as they went out the door.

"Ah, young love," Lyra sighed.

"Yeah," Bon-Bon nodded in agreement. "How long do you think it'll last?"

"I'd give it another two weeks at least."

Since the ruling of equal marriage rights in the United States a couple weeks ago, I wanted to write something involving Lyra and Bon-Bon, especially now that we know more about their characters in the canon world. Besides, I've wanted to address the issue of Raspberry and Lemon Drop's seemingly one-sided relationship. It's not a fantastic chapter, but I'm glad to be back in the game.

The Lyra and Bon-Bon song was kind of based on the "Under Your Spell" literal version at the part with their piano duet. The closet story was based on how two of my gal pals got together as a couple.

White Swan

Heads up: you might want to listen to *Swan Lake* while reading this.

Cherry could tell she was being watched by the way her fur was standing at the back of her neck. It was because of this she could not focus on Mrs. Cheerilee's lecture. She turned her head and sure enough, her suspicions were confirmed. Pin Cushion was staring at her with a goofy smile on his face.

"What?" she whispered harshly.

"Nothing," Pin Cushion replied. "I just think you're pretty."

She rolled her eyes. "I told you! I'm not interested, okay?"

He pouted. "Why not, Cherry? Is it because I tease you guys? I only do it for Kicks' approval, and it's never directed at you."

"I just don't like you, okay? Is that so hard to believe?"

"But why? I'm a guy, right?"

She grunted. "Why is every filly expected to like some pony just because he's a…"

"Cherry, Pin Cushion!"

Mrs. Cheerilee's voice made the two sit up straight. The teacher was tapping her hoof and glaring at them.

"Is there something you'd like to share with the class?"

"Uh…" Pin Cushion stammered.

"Yes, actually," Cherry said, which surprised every pony. She turned back to the colt and said, "It's never gonna happen, dude!"

Several of the foals snickered while Pin Cushion sank into his chair.

"Alright, alright, every pony, quiet down," Mrs. Cheerilee commanded softly. "Now, before our little," she coughed, "disruption, I was about to announce our next history project."

The entire class groaned in displeasure.

"Don't worry. This will be a fun project. I'm going to put you in pairs and you and your partner will select a historical figure on whom you will do an oral report. You may use any visual representation to back up your report: a poster, a skit, anything you can think of!"

Gemstone raised her hoof. "Can we choose our partners?"

"No," the teacher said, taking a straw hat out of her desk. "You will be choosing your partner randomly."

The class groaned again. Prism glanced apologetically at Gemstone, as they usually worked together on projects.

"Now," Cheerilee continued, "so there will be no mix-ups, I've put the names of those of you in the back two rows in here, which those of you in the front will select."

"Guess that means neither of us will be together," Blueberry whispered to her sisters.

"Yeah," Raspberry sighed, glancing at Lemon Drop.

"It also means I won't be with Pin Cushion," Cherry smiled in satisfaction.

"Lemon Drop, why don't you go first?" Cheerilee asked, holding out the straw hat to the yellow colt.

Lemon Drop used his magic to lift one of the folded papers out of the hat and opened it up.

"Prism," he read aloud.

"Phew," Prism heaved from the back row. "Glad I didn't get some

pony lame."

"Don't get too excited about it!" Raspberry exclaimed, sending a warning glare at the pegasus as she reached her hoof into the hat. She opened up her paper and said, "Kicks?"

"Oh boy," the green pegasus said, burying his hooves in his face.

"There's no way mine could be worse," Blueberry whispered as she read her paper. "Crest?"

She glanced back at the white unicorn with the blue mane. He smiled at her, showing off his sparkling teeth. Blueberry cringed slightly.

Cherry gulped as she drew her paper out of the hat, hoping it wasn't as bad as what her sisters got. When she read the name, her mouth sprung into a smile.

"Hey, I got Gemstone!"

"Oh," Gemstone said, unsure of how to react.

"Hey, at least it's some pony you know," Prism whispered.

"But Cherry can be sort of…excited."

"Yeah, but she's not so bad to work with. She can help you with any reading or writing, anyway. I'm sure you'll do fine."

When class let out that afternoon, many of the pairs caught up with each other to start work.

"Any ideas?" Prism asked Lemon Drop.

"Well, I don't know," he replied. "I don't really have a favorite historical figure, but I do have a lot of stamps on them. You?"

"Well, I don't know if you know who Commander Easy Glider is…"

"The premier Wonderbolts choreographer?"

Her eyes widened. "Yeah. How'd you know?"

"I have her stamp! Limited edition too!"

"Really? I've got her trading card! With a hologram!"

"Cool! Can I see it?"

"Only if you show me your stamp!"

"Deal!"

Some were less pleased about the project than others.

"So I was thinking we could do our report on Green Violet Black," Crest told Blueberry.

The filly scrunched her nose. "Green Violet Black?"

"The father of operative dentistry."

"Fun," Blueberry groaned.

"Come on!" Kicks whined. "Sugar Ray Lemon was one of the best boxers in history!"

"But boxing is so violent!" Raspberry complained. "We gotta do Shakespony! He was the best playwright ever!"

"Blech! And the sappiest! My mom dragged me to one of those plays, and I couldn't understand a word of it!

"It's more entertaining than watching a bunch of guys punching each other!"

Meanwhile, Gemstone was walking alongside Cherry towards town.

"So, um," the unicorn stammered, "my house or yours?"

"It'll probably be crowded there if my sisters bring their partners home," Cherry replied, "so I guess your house."

"Oh. Okay."

"This is gonna be so much fun! We never really hang out, you know?"

"Hmm. That's right. I'm usually with Prism and you're with your sisters."

"Not to mention we hung out with Prism a lot before you moved here. This'll give us a chance to really bond as friends! Ooh, this is gonna be great!"

Gemstone yelped as Cherry threw her hooves around her neck. "Um…sure! Great!"

When they entered Carousel Boutique, Rarity was working on a new dress, Jewel sitting in a playpen nearby.

"Hello, Mummy!" Gemstone called as she and Cherry passed by. "Cherry and I are going upstairs to work on our history project!"

"That's nice, dear," Rarity said nonchalantly.

After a few seconds, she dropped her needle and looked at the pair. "Cherry? I thought Prism usually worked with you on projects."

"We picked names out of a hat this time," Gemstone explained.

"Oh. Well, have fun. Let me know if you need any help."

The fillies entered Gemstone's room and set down their saddlebags.

"Well," Gemstone said, "did you have any pony in mind for our project?"

Cherry shook her head. "Nope! You can pick the pony if you want to!"

"Oh. Well, the subject I have in mind isn't a pony, but…"

She ignited her horn and picked something off her bookshelf.

"I thought we could do our report on Tchaicowsky."

"Chai- *who* -ski?" Cherry asked.

"Tchaicowsky, one of the greatest composers of classical music ever!"

Cherry looked at the object that now lay in Gemstone's hooves. It was a record album with the drawing of a well-dressed cow on the cover.

"He's a cow?"

"Technically, he's a bull," Gemstone said as she laid the record on her gramophone. "He's from Moscow."

"Well," Cherry said with a shrug, "I'm not too big on classical music…"

"Oh, I think you'll like Tchaicowsky. He wrote ballets like *Sleeping Beauty* , *The Nutcracker* …"

"Ooh, I love those stories!"

"And my personal favorite, *Swan Lake.* "

She placed the needle on the record and a slow, haunting melody filled the room.

" *Swan Lake* ?" Cherry said, rattling her brain. "Oh, yeah! I know that ballet!"

"You do?" Gemstone asked in surprise.

"Yeah! In fact, we danced to this in ballet class. It's the main theme, isn't it?"

"Err…yes, it is. Wait. You take ballet?"

"Sure, me and my sisters. Well, when we were five, anyway. Mom wanted to make sure we all knew how to dance in some way."

The unicorn blinked. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"You didn't ask."

"But wait. If you took ballet, how is it you know what *Swan Lake* is,

but not Tchaicowsky?"

The earth pony shrugged. "Hey, I was five. I didn't always pay attention." Her ears perked up as the song reached its climax. "Oh! I remember this part!"

Gemstone watched in amazement as Cherry rose onto her hind legs and lifted her front hooves above her head, rising onto the tips of her back hooves in the process. She slowly went down, sticking her back left leg behind her and balancing on her right, her forelegs now spread out in front and behind. She did simple moves like walk on her toe tips and pirouette, but it made the unicorn gawk all the same.

"Wow," she uttered. "Could you teach me some of that?"

Cherry shrugged. "Well, I'm no expert myself, but okay."

She took Gemstone's front hooves and walked her onto the open floor. The unicorn yelped as she nearly tripped, as she wasn't accustomed to walking on her hind legs.

"Can't we do it on all fours?"

"Sorry," Cherry giggled. "This is how ballerinas dance. Don't worry. I'll hold you up until you get the hang of it. First, I'll show you the positions. First position is when you have your heels together."

She demonstrated and looked at Gemstone expectantly.

"Oh," she said, bringing her heels together.

"Now we'll do what is called a *plié,* which is pretty much just bending the knees."

"Does that mean I have to let go?!"

"No. We'll do it together. On three, we'll both go down. One, two, three!"

They both bended their knees and slowly lowered themselves. Gemstone shut her eyes tight.

"It's over, Gem," Cherry laughed. "You did it."

"I did?" the unicorn asked, opening one eye and seeing that they were up again. "Oh. Yay!"

"Now we'll do a *relevé* , which is when you go on your tippy toes."

"But…we don't have toes."

"I know, but it's cuter to say it like that! We'll have to raise our forelegs as we do it, so keep your hooves on mine. Ready?"

Gemstone gulped again. "I think so."

"Okay. One, two, three!"

The unicorn shut her eyes again as they slowly raised their front hooves, lifting their back heels in the process. Cherry couldn't help but chuckle at how nervous Gemstone was, and how she was clinging desperately to her hooves, as if she would ever let her go.

"We're on the ground, Gem. You can look again."

Gemstone opened her eyes and glanced down at their hooves. "Hey! That wasn't so hard!"

"Good. Now we'll do the same thing in second position."

" *Second* position?! You mean there's *more* ?!"

"Of course! You didn't think ballerinas kept their heels together all the time, did you?"

"I don't know, Cherry. I've never been good with physical exercise."

"Relax, I'm here to help. Now, second position is when you spread your back legs apart…"

When Rarity came up to check on the fillies a few hours later, she was met with a surprise. The two were dancing on their hind legs, twirling and waving their forelegs about, and giggling like…well, like

fillies.

"So, is *this* a *portabray* , too?" Gemstone asked as she flapped her forelegs like a chicken, which made Cherry throw her head back in laughter.

"It's called a *port de bras* ! And no, Gem! That's a chicken dance!"

"Well, you said it was any movement made with the forelegs! It can be a chicken ballet!"

Cherry was now laughing so hard that she fell onto her back. "Stop it, Gem! You're killing me!"

"Now what is going on here?" Rarity asked, slightly amused at the spectacle.

Gemstone turned to her mother and dropped onto her hooves in embarrassment. "Oh, Mother! Cherry was, um, showing me some ballet moves."

"I can see that."

"No, really!"

"A *chicken* ballet, eh?"

The unicorn filly blushed. "I was just, um…you know."

"Oh, that's perfectly alright, darling. I'd hate to spoil your fun, but dinner's ready and Cherry should be getting home."

"It's dinnertime, already?!" Cherry gasped, glancing at the clock on the wall. "Huh. We were having so much fun, my stomach didn't even notice!"

"Oh, we haven't even done much on our report!" Gemstone exclaimed.

"Well," Cherry said as she got up, "we have our topic, anyway. Tchaicowsky's pretty cool."

The unicorn gasped. "And we could make our own dance for our presentation!"

"Oh, how darling!" Rarity said. "Though didn't you say this was also a history report?"

"That's right," Cherry agreed. "We should meet at the library after school tomorrow and read up more on this Tchaicowsky."

"Oh," Gemstone uttered, circling her hoof in the floor. "Prism usually helps me with the reading part of assignments."

"Aw, I can help you with that!"

"Really?"

"Yeah, I can read too, you know!" Cherry giggled as she strapped on her saddlebag. "Well, see ya tomorrow!"

The fillies waved at each other as Cherry bounced out the door, down the stairs and out of the boutique.

"Boy, was that fun!" she chimed on her way home. "Gem's a lot more fun than I thought! I mean she was always fun, but I didn't know she could be so goofy! Hmm. She's not that bad at dancing either. Ooh, I can't wait until tomorrow!"

The next afternoon, the Golden Oak Library was filled with foals studying for their history project. In one corner, Blueberry was flipping through the pages of a book on dental history, while Crest was going on and on about dental hygiene:

"Did you know that acidic liquids such as lemonade and soft drinks don't actually cause cavities but *do* cause severe tooth decay?"

"No, I didn't," Blueberry said mechanically.

"Did you know that old ponies also get more cavities than foals, despite popular belief?"

"You don't say."

"And did you know if a cavity is not treated, it can create a hole in the tooth that will keep growing until it creates an infection in the pulp chamber?"

The filly groaned and slammed her head on the open book. "Why, Celestia? Why?"

On the other side of the room, Kicks and Raspberry were each waving a book at each other.

"We're doing Sugar Ray!" the colt insisted.

"We're doing Shakespony!" the filly argued.

"Sugar Ray!"

"Shakespony!"

"Sugar Ray!"

"Shakespony!"

They paused when they noticed Prism and Lemon Drop racing inside the library excitedly.

"Aunt Twilight, Aunt Twilight!" Prism shouted.

The alicorn flew down from the shelves and smiled. "Ah, more eager learners, I see. I can't remember the last time I had so many customers at once."

"We need a book on Commander Easy Glider. It's for our history report."

"Ah, excellent choice." She ignited her horn and pulled a big book off the shelf. " *The Most Complete Book on the History of the Wonderbolts* will tell you all you need to know."

Both foals gawked at the size of the book.

"We have to read *the whole thing* ?!" Prism exclaimed.

"Like mother, like daughter," Twilight chuckled. "Actually, there's only one chapter specifically on Commander Easy Glider, with diagrams of her choreography."

The pegasus filly sighed. "If only we could fly. Then we could perform some of Easy Glider's moves for our presentation."

"Maybe we don't have to," Lemon Drop suggested. "We could just draw copies of some of the diagrams and put them on a poster."

Prism gasped. "Hey! I've got an idea! With your Wonderbolt stamps, my Wonderbolt posters and trading cards…"

"And all those drawings you make…"

"We could make a collage!"

"Cool! Oh, but we can't damage my stamps with glue or thumbtacks or anything like that. They're collectibles."

"That's okay. I have double-sided tape I use to hang up my posters and drawings. You can tape your stamps to the poster and then remove them without any damage at all!"

"Perfect!"

"This report will be a snap!"

The two bumped their hooves together and cried, "Teamwork!"

They laughed as they exited the library, Lemon Drop levitating the book.

"Gee," Kicks uttered, his eyes not leaving the door. "They look like they're having…fun."

"Yeah," Raspberry said, staring in the same direction as him. "They seem to be getting along…well."

In another corner, Cherry and Gemstone were reading about Tchaicowsky, or rather Cherry was dictating the parts Gemstone had trouble reading.

"Whoa!" Cherry gasped suddenly, picking up the book and reading the last line again.

"What is it?" the unicorn asked.

"Apparently, in Tchaicowsky's time, his ballets were considered flops!"

"Flops?! Those brilliant works of art?! I refuse to believe it!"

"History books don't lie. At least the ones Auntie Twilight keeps."

"But…he was a genius! He was practically writing concertos at our age!"

"Kind of like us, huh?"

Gemstone scrunched her nose. "Huh?"

"I mean we weren't writing *con-cheer-toes* or anything, but even though we don't know what our talents are, we still gotta have them, right? But no pony, not even us, can see them."

"That's…pretty poetic, Cherry."

Cherry shrugged. "Probably Raspberry's influence."

"I still can't believe that genius had enormous talent but wasn't appreciated for it. Oh well. I guess he was ahead of his time."

"Kind of like us."

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"I don't know. Thought it sounded cool."

Gemstone laughed and shook her head.

A few days later, Rarity was fitting Cherry for her ballerina outfit for the presentation while Gemstone was on the floor, making something with tiny gems.

"So let me get this straight," Cherry said after Rarity had explained to her the story of *Swan Lake.* "This guy Von Rothbart turns Odette into a swan for…what reason?"

"It depends on the production," Rarity replied. "It was never clear in the first version of the ballet. In some performances, it's because she refuses to marry him."

"Didn't Uncle Discord do something like that?" Gemstone asked.

"Oh, well, um…sort of. That was different, you see. Discord didn't put a spell on Fluttershy…well, except that one time he…well, they love each other! And he's good now! Most of the time."

"And then Von Rothbart tricks the prince," Cherry continued, "into pledging his love to his daughter, whom he made to look like Odette, and Odette's so sad that she drowns herself and the prince dives into the lake with her? That's a terrible ending!"

"Yes, it is. That is why there have been several different versions where Odette and her prince live happily ever after."

"I like that ending better," Gemstone commented.

"Yeah," Cherry snorted. "I mean why teach kids to die for someone you danced with only one night ago? Why die for them anyway? I mean even if you love them, come on! There are other fish in the sea, or…swans in the lake, right?"

"It's supposed to be romantic, though I agree I like it better when they live happily ever after."

The earth filly tilted her head to get a peek at Gemstone's arts and crafts project. "What are you working on, anyway?"

"You'll see. It's a surprise."

Meanwhile, at the Party Palace, Raspberry and Kicks were still arguing about their project.

"Sugar Ray!"

"Shakespony!"

"Sugar Ray!"

"Shakespony!"

"This is getting ridiculous!" Kicks finally said. "We have one more week for this project! We've gotta pick something!"

"You're right," Raspberry sighed. "And that's gonna be Shakespony!"

"Sugar Ray!"

"Shakespony!"

They paused when the front door opened and in walked Prism and Lemon Drop. Raspberry and Kicks smiled and waved.

"Hey, Prism," Kicks said.

"Hey, Lemon…" Raspberry started to say.

"Aunt Pinkie, you here?" Prism called.

Kicks' and Raspberry's faces fell as their respective sweethearts passed by them without a sideways glance. Pinkie Pie zoomed up to the pair in response to their call.

"Hey, guys!" she piped. "What can I do for ya?"

"We need some glitter," Lemon Drop explained.

"It's for our collage," Prism added.

"Can do!" Pinkie exclaimed. "What kind?"

"What do you think?" the pegasus filly asked, turning to her partner.

"Well, it is a report on a Wonderbolt," the unicorn colt said, scratching his head, "so…blue and gold?"

"Sounds good to me!"

Pinkie zipped away and came back with a giant container of blue and gold glitter. "Use with caution!"

Prism gasped as Pinkie dropped it onto her back. Lemon Drop used his magic to lift it.

"Thanks," Prism smiled.

Raspberry frowned but then batted her eyelashes. "Oh, Lemony, how'd you like to…?"

"Come on," Lemon Drop said as he and his partner raced out the door. "Let's get back to my house and put the finishing touches on the collage!"

"We still gotta figure out what we're gonna say!" Prism reminded him.

"How about we gather up our notes tonight and start work on the speech tomorrow?"

"Sounds like a plan!"

Kicks' and Raspberry's jaws dropped as they watched the pair leave.

"I don't believe it," Kicks uttered.

"He didn't even say hello to me!" Raspberry exclaimed.

The pegasus slumped against the wall and to the floor. "I mean she could have at least acknowledged me!"

The filly joined him. "I'm his girlfriend for crying out loud!"

"There's no way she's…"

"There's no way he's…"

"No, she can't be!"

"She's not even his type!"

"Sure, we made no commitment to each other, but I thought we had something special!"

Raspberry raised her eyebrow at him. "What are you talking about?"

Kicks put his hoof in his mouth and glanced at Raspberry.

" *Nuh-fuh* ," he said through his hoof.

She put her hoof on her hip and narrowed her eyes. "Okay, I know why *I'm* bugged about Prism and Lemon Drop spending so much time together, but why are *you* ?"

He backed away as she leaned forward and scrutinized him. Then she gasped, looked out the front door and then at him.

"No…way."

Kicks shook his head insistently.

"No, *way* !" Raspberry exclaimed, her lips curling into a smile. "You have a crush on Prism!"

" *Nuh-ah…* " Kicks took out his hoof. "No, I don't!"

"You *do* ! Oh, boy! I can't believe I didn't see it before! Is that why you always pick on her? 'Cuz you *like* her?"

"No, no, no! I don't *like* her! I don't…fantasize her holding my hoof or keep a shrine to her in my room—oomph!" He covered his mouth again. "Why did I tell you that?!"

Raspberry laughed as she stared chanting, "You're in love with Prism, you're in love with Prism, you're in love with Prism!"

"Okay, okay! So I like her! So what?! You tell any pony and I pound you!"

"Chill, dude. Your secret's safe with me. So…how did this happen, anyway?"

He looked away. "You wouldn't understand."

"Kicks, Kicks, Kicks," she said, putting a hoof on his shoulder and leading him into the living room. "If there's any pony you can trust with a romantic dilemma, it's yours truly."

She sat him on the couch, hopped into an easy chair, took out her notepad and pencil and flipped on a pair of glasses.

"Tell Dr. Razz all about it."

Before Kicks knew it, he was pouring out everything involving his admiration for Prism, excluding the kiss they had shared last Hearts and Hooves Day, as they had promised not to let that leak out. Raspberry only nodded as she jotted down notes.

"It's weird, but every time she socks me or puts me down, I like her even more! Am I crazy or something?"

"Crazy in love, is more like it," Raspberry commented.

"Wow," he breathed. "It feels good to get all that out."

"So that's why you're upset about her spending time with Lemon Drop. You're jealous." She sighed as she took off her glasses. "I guess I am too."

"Hey," Kicks said, sitting up. "Maybe we're overreacting. I mean… that guy's crazy about you."

She smiled up at him. "Really?"

"Well, he must be if he lets you drag him around everywhere you go."

She frowned. "Thanks." She tapped her chin with her pencil. "You know? This kind of thing happens in Shakespony all the time."

Kicks groaned. "Again with the lovey-dovey stuff?"

"I mean love triangles, misunderstandings… It's a good thing we aren't suicidal."

He blinked. "Suicidal?"

"Oh, yeah. Romeo and Juliet kill themselves in the end."

"They do?" He smirked. "Cool."

Raspberry's face lit up as an idea occurred to her. "Actually…a lot of violent stuff happens in Shakespony. There are lots of swordfights in *Romeo and Juliet* ."

"Really?" Kicks said, leaning his chin on his hooves. "Tell me more."

"Then we pirouette," Cherry instructed as she and Gemstone ran through their routine, "and come together and bow."

"Hey, I did it!" the unicorn exclaimed. "I mean *we* did it!"

"See? Not bad for a couple of novices, eh?"

"Not sure what that means, but we're great! And your *chora* … *chora* …your dance moves are brilliant!"

"I think we're ready for tomorrow. Have you got your part of the speech memorized, or do we need to go over it again?"

"Oh, no. I think I've got it. Oh! I almost forgot!"

She went to her dresser and levitated two objects out of the top drawer. Cherry gasped when she saw that they were gold chains with swan pendants. One landed in her hoof. Upon closer inspection, she saw that the swan was encrusted with miniature diamonds outlining the body and wings.

"Oh, wow!" Cherry uttered. "Did you make these?"

"Mmm-hmm," Gemstone nodded as she used her magic to put their necklaces on. "Thanks to the jewelry-making kit I got for Hearth's

Warming. I thought we could wear these with our leotards! No outfit is complete without a good accessory!"

The earth filly looked up at the unicorn and gave her a hug. "It's beautiful, Gem! I love it!"

"Oh," Gemstone said, wrapping her hooves around her friend. "You're welcome. Glad you like it."

There was a long silence.

"Um…Cherry?"

"Oops!" Cherry blushed, pulling away. "Sorry."

Friday was Presentation Day, and Mrs. Cheerilee was quite impressed with its turnout.

"What made Shakespony such a great writer," Kicks said to the class, "is that he experimented with so many different genres. Some plays were romantic…"

Raspberry stood up with a pink cone-shaped hat on her head and put her foreleg up to her forehead dramatically, saying, "Oh Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

"…and some had action."

The filly knocked off her hat and pulled out a wooden sword. "Have at thee, Romeo!"

"And some had a little bit of both," Kicks smirked as he took out a wooden sword of his own. " *En garde* , Paris! Juliet is mine!"

"No way, she is mine!"

They started swinging their swords at each other, until Kicks "stabbed" Raspberry. She gasped as she dropped her sword to cling to the one under her foreleg.

"Oh, I am slain!" she wailed. "If thou be merciful, open the tomb! Lay me with Juliet!"

Then she collapsed to the floor. The class clapped their hooves and Raspberry stood up so she and Kicks could take a bow.

"Excellent work, you two!" Cheerilee said as the pair took their seats. "Great teamwork!"

"Since when are you into Shakespony?" Prism whispered to Kicks.

"Eh," he shrugged. "It's okay. You know, when ponies are killing each other."

She smirked. "Uh-huh."

"Our last presenters will be Gemstone and Cherry Pie," Cheerilee announced. "Girls, are you ready?"

Cherry and Gemstone were dressed in white leotards and tutus, their matching necklaces hanging around their necks. Cherry turned back to her friend, who was shaking in her hooves. She gave her a reassuring smile and rose from her desk. Gemstone did the same and joined her up front.

"Um," the unicorn gulped. "Our report is on Tchaicowsky, the famous bovine composer. He was born in Moscow in…"

When their dance was over, the class clapped even harder than they did for the previous team. Gemstone gasped as she fell onto her front hooves. Cherry patted her on the back.

"Hey, we did it," she whispered.

"Yeah," the unicorn breathed, giving her friend a smile. "Thanks for all your help."

The school bell rang and the foals gathered their belongings.

"Alright, excellent work today, class!" Cheerilee called over the

hubbub. "I'm thrilled with how well you all collaborated with each other! Have a fun weekend!"

"Glad that's over," Blueberry mumbled to Raspberry. "If I had to hear one more tooth story from Crest… Ugh! Let's just say I know more about dental hygiene than I'll ever need to know."

"Yeah, Kicks and I didn't really get along at first either," Raspberry said.

"How'd you convince him to do a report on Shakespony, anyway?" Prism asked.

"Turns out, we share a common interest."

She spotted Kicks and winked at him. He winked back before heading home.

"I didn't think Lemon Drop and I would work so well together," Prism speculated. "He's even cooler than I thought."

"Yeah," Raspberry cringed. "About that…"

"Hey, Razz!" Lemon Drop called as he caught up to them. "Hey, sorry we haven't spent much time together the past couple weeks. I've been really busy with this history project."

"Oh, uh…have you? I didn't even notice."

"Yeah, well, how about we do something later? I have to go home now, but…"

"Sugar Cube Corner at four?"

"It's a date!"

Raspberry sighed dreamily as the colt darted off. "What do you know? I was worried over nothing."

"Huh?" Prism asked.

"Never mind."

Cherry and Gemstone were the last to exit the schoolhouse, as they were getting out of their leotards, but still kept their necklaces on.

"Did you see how awesome we were?" Cherry chimed. "We didn't even stumble once!"

"I'm still buzzing about this!" Gemstone squealed. "Though…I'm a little sad it's over."

"We *did* have a lot of fun together, didn't we?"

"Yeah," the unicorn sighed.

Cherry's face lit up. "Hey, you wanna…?"

"Gem, hey!" a colt's voice called.

The two fillies looked ahead as Dunkin ran up to them.

"Gem, that was some amazing dancing back there! You were great! Oh, you too, Cherry."

Gemstone blushed, which made Cherry frown.

"So, you ready to go?" Dunkin asked.

"Go?" Cherry repeated.

"Oh, yes," Gemstone said, taking the colt's hoof. "Dunkin and I have plans to go to the movies."

She didn't know why, but seeing Gemstone's hoof in Dunkin's made Cherry's chest feel like it was being stabbed with something sharp.

"H-huh?" she uttered. "But…I thought your dad said you were too young to have a…c-c-c…"

"He did," Gemstone replied, "but Dunkin's not my coltfriend. We're just going to the movies." She winked. "Know what I mean?"

Cherry glanced between them. "Um…"

"You're welcome to join us, if you'd like. We're seeing a cartoon

about talking beavers. I know you like that sort of stuff."

"N-no. I'd just be a third wheel. You guys go…have fun."

"Oh. Well, okay. See you later, Cherry."

As she watched the young couple go, Cherry suddenly felt stick to her stomach.

"There you are!" Blueberry exclaimed, slapping her sister on the back. "Great job on the dance! Made me want to take ballet again!"

"And such a wonderful selection!" Raspberry piped. "Tchaicowsky writes the most beautiful music!"

"Hey, let's celebrate by getting something to eat!"

"Okay, but not too much! I still have that date with Lemony later."

"I'm not hungry," Cherry mumbled.

Her sisters turned to her in shock, crying, "Not hungry?!"

Blueberry put her hoof to Cherry's forehead. "You okay, sis?"

The red filly sighed. "No."

"What's wrong?" Raspberry asked in concern.

"I feel kinda sick, like…I swallowed something bad."

"Was it the eggs we had this morning?" Blueberry asked. "I had a feeling those were undercooked!"

"I don't know. I just feel…icky."

"Let's get you home," Raspberry said, laying a hoof on Cherry's shoulder. "Maybe Mom and Dad can figure out what's wrong with you."

A short time later, all the Pies were in Cherry's room, the red filly

sitting on her bed with her parents on either side.

"Hmm," Pinkie said as she felt her daughter's forehead. "No fever."

Cheese took her hoof. "Her pulse is slower than usual."

"Maybe she's just worn out from all the dancing. She was bound to collapse at some point."

"But *Cherry* ?!" Raspberry exclaimed.

"Maybe you just need to lie down, honey," Cheese said, laying Cherry onto her back. "A little nap will help you."

"I guess," Cherry muttered as her mother pulled the covers over her.

Her parents kissed her on the forehead.

"Sleep well, sweetie," Cheese whispered.

"Feel better," said Pinkie.

Cherry's parents and sisters quietly stepped out of the room, turned out the light and closed the door. Cherry held out the swan pendant around her neck and stared at it. She didn't know why, but the sight of it made her feel worse. She closed her eyes so she wouldn't have to look at it and tried to get some sleep.

The next thing Cherry knew, she was in a grand ballroom. She glanced around, wondering how she had gotten there, and then caught a glimpse of her attire. She was wearing her white leotard, only now it was sparkling, and there were feathers draped over her shoulders.

Suddenly, she heard music, very familiar music. She looked up and saw that she wasn't alone in the ballroom. Dancing a few feet away from her was Gemstone and…herself! At least, a filly that looked like her, only she was dressed in black. Lightning flashed from outside and for a split second, the other Cherry became Dunkin.

Cherry gasped and cried, "Gem, stop! That's not me!"

She tried to run towards her, but her hooves were paralyzed.

"What?"

An evil laugh filled the room, which did not seem to faze the two dancers.

"She can't hear you, Cherry," said a sinister voice sounding like Pin Cushion's.

The unicorn colt appeared at her side, smiling wickedly. He was in a dark leotard covered in brown feathers, which also made up his headdress.

"What have you done to her?!" Cherry demanded. "Gem, snap out of it! She's not me! Gem!"

"Give it up, Cherry," Pin Cushion said, putting his hoof around her. "Can't you see she's happy with her new partner?"

"Only because she thinks she's me! If she knew who it really was, she wouldn't…"

"Wanna bet?"

His horn glowed and the dark Cherry transformed into Dunkin. Gemstone gasped in alarm.

"You're not Cherry!"

"Ha!" Cherry said triumphantly.

Gemstone's lips then curled into a smile. "You're even better."

Cherry's face fell as the couple continued their dance. "What?"

"You see?" Pin Cushion smirked. "Fillies are meant to dance with colts. It's how it goes. You should've just agreed to be *my* partner. Then you could've spared yourself the heartbreak."

"No!" Cherry cried as she shook him off. "This…this isn't how it

should end! Gem! It's supposed to end happily! Gem! Gem!"

But the unicorn filly didn't hear her. She just kept dancing with the earth colt, both of them smiling brightly. Cherry could feel herself sinking into the floor, the room disappearing around her.

"Gem, listen to me!" she shouted. "Stop dancing with him! Gem! Gem!"

Cherry gasped as she sat up in bed. She looked at her surroundings, finding that it was dark and her sisters were asleep in their beds. She sighed in relief that it had all been a dream.

And yet…it hadn't been.

Cherry crawled out of bed and headed towards her parents' room. They were snoozing soundly, embracing each other under the covers. Cherry leaped onto the foot of the bed, accidentally stepping on her mother's hoof.

"Gah!" Pinkie cried, sitting up. "Cheese!"

"Wha?" Cheese exclaimed, his eyes snapping open. "What happened?"

"It's finally happened! The potatoes are taking over!"

"Mom, Dad, it's me!" Cherry exclaimed.

Pinkie fell quiet and switched on the bedside lamp. "Cherry? What are you doing up?"

The filly hung her head. "I had a nightmare."

"Aw," Cheese said, sticking out his lip.

"You had a nightmare?" Pinkie questioned. "And Princess Luna didn't do anything about it?" She scowled. "I'm gonna give that alicorn a strong talking to next time I see her!"

"Worry about that later, Pinkie." He turned to his daughter. "Come here, sweetie. Tell us all about it."

Cherry sniffed as she crawled into her parents' hooves and began telling them all about her dream. When she was finished, Pinkie and Cheese looked at each other and nodded as they made a silent agreement.

"Cherry," Cheese began slowly, "when exactly did you start feeling sick in your stomach?"

"Well," Cherry said in thought, "I think it was right after Gemstone and Dunkin left for the movies."

He looked at Pinkie again, who appeared to be thinking the same thing.

"You and Gemstone have been spending an awful lot of time together lately, haven't you?" Pinkie asked.

"Uh-huh," Cherry said, lying back on the pillows. "The past two weeks have been fun. I taught her ballet, I helped her with reading, she made us necklaces…" She twirled the swan pendant in her hoof. "She made these for our project, just for the two of us. It…it made me feel…"

"Special?" Cheese finished for her.

She sighed. "Yeah."

Her parents glanced at each other again and decided to further.

"Honey," Pinkie said carefully, "do you think that maybe, you felt sick because…Gemstone was hanging out with Dunkin?"

"I guess," Cherry mumbled. "Yeah. I don't know why. I mean she's hung out with him before, but now…I don't know. Seeing them together just made me feel…icky."

Cheese sighed and held his hoof out to Pinkie. "I told you she liked fillies. You owe me five bits."

The filly sat up. "Huh?"

"Not yet, Cheesy!" Pinkie giggled. "I bet that she liked *all* genders!

We have yet to establish that!"

"What are you guys talking about?"

Her parents let out a collective sigh.

"We'll give it to you straight, sweetie," said Cheese. "You were upset when Gemstone went off with Dunkin…"

"…because you have a crush on Gemstone," Pinkie finished.

"What?" Cherry said in surprise. "I do not have a…"

She paused and pondered on it for a moment. She *had* enjoyed their time together, and she *had* always considered Gemstone prettier than most fillies. She had always supported fillies liking other fillies, but she had never considered the possibility that she might be…

"Huh," she uttered. "I…I guess I… *do* have a crush on Gemstone."

The minute she said it, it felt like a great weight had been lifted off of her, so it must have been the truth.

Then she suddenly burst into tears and buried her face into her mother's shoulder.

"There, there," Pinkie said, patting her back. "It's nothing to be ashamed of."

"It's not that," the filly sobbed. "Gem…doesn't…"

"Shhh. I know. And I mean *really* know. I had crushes on all of my best friends, except AJ, which is probably a good thing, considering there's a seventy-percent possibility that we're related. Anyway, it was the same story with all of them: not interested in mares, didn't think of me that way. But you know what? That doesn't matter, because I've got your dad."

Cherry looked up with teary eyes. "Are you saying I have to marry a," she gulped, "colt?"

"No, no, sweetie. You can marry whoever you want! I'm just not really picky when it comes to gender."

The filly looked at her father. "And you, Daddy? Do you like colts too?"

"Why does every pony assume that about me?" Cheese Sandwich grumbled, crossing his hooves.

"Anyway," Pinkie said, "just because it won't work out with Gem, doesn't mean you'll never find some pony. You're still young, and there are plenty of swans in the lake. Besides, most foals don't even realize their romantic preferences until they're older. It might be a while before you find some filly who will like you back."

"It won't be Gem though," Cherry murmured.

"You never know. She could like colts *and* fillies. Though I wouldn't get your hopes too high. Don't go holding onto this one crush to the point where you won't be able to sleep or eat and then the pain becomes too unbearable that you'll no longer wish to live…"

"What your mother is trying to say is," Cheese quickly interrupted, "that for now, you should just enjoy having Gemstone as a friend. Think you can do that?"

Cherry sniffed, but then smiled softly and nodded. "Yeah. I can do that."

"Good. Now, do you want to stay here, or…?"

"I…don't really wanna be alone right now."

Her parents smiled. Pinkie turned off the light and the three of them snuggled under the covers together. Before Cherry fell asleep, she took one last look at the jeweled swan and grinned.

When Cherry entered the Cutie Mark Crusader clubhouse the next day, Gemstone raced up to her in concern.

"Cherry, are you alright? Your sisters told me you weren't feeling well! What happened?"

"I'm okay, Gem," Cherry said, giving a soft smile. "I was just…tired from the dancing yesterday."

The unicorn sighed in relief. "Oh, good. I was worried. Hey! You're still wearing your swan necklace! So am I!"

The two held up their pendants and giggled.

"Well, they *are* fabulous!" Cherry chimed.

"I know, aren't they?" Gemstone squealed.

"Hey, girly-girls!" Prism called from the podium. "We have a meeting, remember?"

"Oh, sorry! Come on, Cherry!"

Cherry watched the pretty unicorn and then glanced back down at the swan pendant. Like in *Swan Lake* , there were many ways her story could turn out. She didn't know what its ending would be, but she would make sure it was a happy one.

Hey, I just realized this is my first Cherry-centered chapter! That covers all of the Crusaders.

Yeah, some of you guessed this about Cherry. Not sure how it happened. Back in Chapter 6, I needed some pony to suggest that Prism's secret admirer might be a filly, and Cherry was the most random of the group. It became a running gag, and when I read this to my creative writing group, they asked, "Is Cherry a lesbian?" Then I started really thinking about it. When you guys started asking if Cherry had a crush on Gemstone in Chapter 16, well, this chapter started. Will Cherry find happiness? Not even I know.

This chapter also gave me the chance to experiment with pairs I don't usually write about (non-romantically, of course). I

thought it'd be funny if Kicks and Raspberry bonded over being jealous of Prism and Lemon Drop being paired up.

There are a lot of puns on names you might not get:

Tchaicowsky=Tchaikovsky

Green Violet Black=Greene Vardiman Black

Shakespony=Shakespeare (duh!)

Sugar Ray Lemon=Sugar Ray Leonard (don't really know him, but his name was easiest to work with)

I didn't go into too much detail with the history and ballet, because that would get tedious (though I actually took ballet when I was little).

Rock Pies

I hadn't realized it's been over a year since I updated this. It wasn't on purpose. I was just so into writing "Precious Blood" that there was no need to take a break with one-shots. And I said this was only for when I was stuck in writing multi-chapter fics and updates wouldn't be as frequent. Well, now I intend to finish this series so I could move on.

I wanted to do this since "Maud Pie," but it's a good thing I waited, otherwise I wouldn't have seen the personalities of Pinkie's other sisters in "Hearthbreakers."

"Hark, Sir Lemon Drop!" Prism exclaimed, pointing her wooden sword at the Cutie Mark Crusaders' Clubhouse. "There lies the castle where the fair Princess Gemstone is being held captive!"

She looked at Lemon Drop, who wore a plastic knight's helmet like hers. They both carried wooden swords and shields bearing the Cutie Mark Crusaders' symbol.

"Should we go rescue her, Sir Prism?" he asked.

"Of course!" Prism said, proudly holding up her sword. "For we are Knights of the Cutie Mark, and it is our duty to protect the innocent! Onward, my friend!"

They trotted towards the treehouse when the Tri-Pies jumped out from behind the trunk, Cherry balancing on the backs of her sisters.

"Watch out, Sir Prism!" Lemon Drop said, coming to a halt. "The dreaded three-headed dog Cerberus is guarding the entrance!"

The Tri-Pies snarled menacingly.

"No three-headed dog is a match for us!" Prism declared. "Let's send this beast back to Tartarus!"

She and Lemon Drop wailed as they charged for the Tri-Pies. Before the wooden swords could make contact, the triplets yelped as Cherry flipped backward off her sisters.

"Great job, Sir Prism!" Lemon Drop cheered. "You've cut off its head!"

"Oh, the pain, the pain!" Cherry whined as she writhed in agony.

"Shush, Cherry!" Prism whispered. "Cerberus doesn't talk!"

"Oh. I mean… Arf! Arf!"

The pegasus put her hoof to her forehead. "You're also *dead* !"

"Oh. Okay."

Cherry fell limp and let her tongue loll. Prism rolled her eyes.

"Come, Sir Lemon Drop! The princess awaits!"

The two knights rushed up the steps and found Gemstone in the middle of the room, wearing a pink conical princess hat.

"My heroes!" she exclaimed.

Lemon Drop held up his sword. "We've come to rescue you, my la—"

"Sir Lemon Drop, look out!" Prism said, stopping him with her foreleg. "Behold! There is but another obstacle!"

The colt gasped as a figure crawled in front of Gemstone. "What is it?"

"It's the dreaded dragon!"

Baby Applespike let out a gurgle and started sucking on his tail.

"Oh, it's so terrifying!" Lemon Drop gasped.

"Save me, brave knights!" Gemstone said, dramatically lifting her foreleg to her head. "Save me from this horrid beast!"

"Gah!" Applespike exclaimed, clapping his hooves.

"Have at thee, dragon!" Prism said, waving her sword threateningly. "You shall not prevail! For we are mightier than…"

"What's going on up here?"

The foals turned to see their six-foot dragon uncle Spike coming up the steps, the wood creaking beneath his enormous feet. Upon hearing his father's voice, Applespike came crawling towards the entrance.

"Dada!" he said, holding up his hooves.

Spike looked down at his son and then at the foals' costumes and gasped. "Were you making believe my son was a fire-breathing dragon holding a princess captive?"

Lemon Drop and Prism gulped. "N-No?"

"Shame on you!" the dragon said as he picked up his boy. "When I asked you kids to watch him for a few minutes while I was helping Applejack catch a loose pig, I didn't mean cast him in a stereotypical role!"

"If it helps, Uncle Spike," Prism said with a nervous laugh. "He wasn't scary enough."

"We didn't mean any harm, Uncle Spike," Raspberry called up to him. "We just wanted to include him in our game."

"Well next time," Spike huffed as he returned to the ground with his son, "don't make him the evil monster."

"Oh he was just the dragon," Cherry chimed. " *We* were the monster."

"Why we always gotta be the monster?" Raspberry pouted. "Just once, can't I be the princess?" She looked up dreamily at her coltfriend. "So Lemony Drop can come and rescue me?"

The colt pulled his helmet over his face in embarrassment.

"Anyway," Spike said, turning to the Tri-Pies, "your dad's here. He's come to take you to the train station."

"Oh, that's right!" Blueberry exclaimed. "Our cousins are coming today!"

"What cousins?" Lemon Drop asked, leaning over the rail.

"Our cousins from the family rock farm," Raspberry explained.

"We haven't seen them since we were five," said Cherry. "And now they're coming to spend the weekend with us!"

"I forget," Prism said. "How are your cousins related to you? I know you have a lot of aunts."

Cherry and Raspberry turned to Blueberry, who cleared her throat and took a deep breath.

"You see we have three male cousins all living on the rock farm with their moms. The oldest is Igneous Rock Pie II or Iggy for short who is eleven years old and named after our grandfather and is Aunt Marble Pie's kid along with Metamorphic Rock Pie who we call Metty who is eight and then there is Aunt Limestone's kid Sedimentary Rock Pie who is ten and nicknamed Seddie."

The Tri-Pies' friends blinked.

"Did you get any of that?" Gemstone whispered.

"Nope," Prism said, shaking her head.

"Well, we better get going!" Blueberry said cheerfully.

"Don't wanna be late!" Raspberry piped.

"Or our cousins will think we've been kidnapped!" Cherry chimed.

The three of them whizzed off.

"So…" Lemon Drop said. "Who's our monster now?"

They looked to Spike, who narrowed his eyes.

"Don't even think about it."

The Tri-Pies bounced up and down as the train pulled into the station.

"Ooh, this is so exciting!" Cherry chimed.

"I can't wait to see Metty!" said Raspberry. "I remember he and I used to look at poetry and puzzle books together!"

"And I remember how Iggy and I would go off into the woods looking for stuff!"

"I may not remember much about Seddie," said Blueberry, "but I remember him being really, really smart!"

"I'm sure they'll be excited to see you too, girls," said Pinkie. "Maybe you all can start swapping rock candy necklaces like Maud and I used to do! Or maybe become pen pals or exchange savings bonds or…"

"Honey, we have to find 'em first," Cheese said as he searched the crowd.

"Don't worry, Dad!" Blueberry exclaimed. "We're on it!"

The Tri-Pies each held up a sign. Cherry's read "Iggy," Blueberry's read "Seddie" and Raspberry's read "Metty." As the crowd dispersed, three earth colts with saddlebags came up to them. All their eyelids were drooped as they stared blankly at the Pies.

The tallest one stood on the left. He was a skinny colt with a gray coat, straight black hair that went down to his shoulders, and dull yellow eyes. The cloudy purple one on the far right was the Tri-Pies' height. His mane was the same style as the tall one's, only it was a light gray, and his eyes were as purple as his coat. In the middle was a short, stout colt holding the tall one's hoof while sucking his free hoof. His coat was also gray, but darker, and his mane was white. Despite the boredom in his eyes, they were bright blue like Pinkie's.

"Boys, you're here!" Pinkie squealed, spreading out her forelegs. "Come give your old Auntie Pinkie Pie a hug!"

"Don't forget one for Uncle Cheese!"

The three colts didn't react as the adults threw their hooves round them.

"Aunt Pinkie," the tall one said monotonously. "Who is this stranger hugging us?"

"Whoops," Cheese chuckled as he backed away. "I forgot. Last time I saw you three, I was Red Shoes, but it's Cheese Sandwich now. Red Shoes was my, uh, secret identity. It's kind of a long story. See, I was running away from my ex-girlfriend because I thought she was stalking me even though she was just trying to return my scarf and…"

"No need to explain," said the purple one in a voice just as bland as the tall one's. "It's obvious you're our uncle. You just died your mane brunette and took the paint off your cutie mark. I knew it was paint all along because the clown nose was smeared last time you visited the rock farm but I didn't say anything because I didn't want to appear judgmental of your life decisions."

"Ooh," Cherry said in awe. "He *is* smart."

"You knew all along?" Blueberry asked. "It took me eight years to figure it out, Seddie!"

Seddie shrugged. "I just noticed."

"In case you don't remember us," the tall one said in his emotionless tone, "I am Igneous Rock Pie II," he flicked the hoof holding the short colt's, "this is my younger brother Metamorphic Rock Pie, and you've already identified Sedimentary Rock Pie."

"Well, we're…" Blueberry started to say.

"You don't need to introduce yourselves," Seddie said as he pointed to each of them. "Blueberry Pancake Pie, Raspberry Strudel Pie, and Cherry Changa Pie."

"You remember us!" Raspberry squealed. "Even our middle names!"

"Even if we didn't, your coat colors give it away."

"I told you it was obvious," Cherry whispered.

"Now that we're all introduced," Pinkie piped, "we'll just scoot on down to the Party Palace and get you all settled!"

"Here, let me take your bags," Cheese Sandwich offered as he reached for the suitcases behind the boys.

But as he picked them up, his forelegs gave way and he collapsed to the floor.

"Geez!" he panted. "What have you boys got in here? Rocks?"

"Yes," Iggy and Seddie murmured.

It took all the Pies to carry the Rock Pies' luggage. Cherry didn't seem to have much difficulty with her load. It was a slow process, but they made it to the Party Palace. Every pony but Cherry and the Rock cousins groaned when they realized they would have to take the stairs. A collective sigh of relief filled the guest room when the bags were finally dropped.

"I hope," Pinkie heaved, "you're all…comfortable…here…your beds…are made…up."

The colts looked around the room.

"It's gray, just how you Rock Pies like it!"

"It's fine," Iggy said bluntly.

"Do you have any refreshments?" Seddie asked.

"Of course!" Cheese chirped. "We have some milk and cookies downstairs! Girls, why don't you help your cousins settle in while your mother and I get the cookies?"

"Can we take the elevator this time?" Pinkie asked with a moan.

"We have an elevator?" Raspberry questioned, cocking her head.

The adults didn't answer as they left the children alone. The boys spread out and silently chose their beds on which they began unloading their saddlebags. Blueberry watched as Seddie took out a thick book.

"Ooh, what you got there?" she said, coming up to the bed so she could read the title. " *The Encyclopedia of Rocks.* "

"I hope to become a rock scientist like Aunt Maud," Seddie said as he brought out a microscope.

Blueberry's jaw dropped. "You have a *microscope* ?!"

"It's for analyzing rock samples, to determine what type of rock they are."

"There's more than one type of rock?"

"Of course. There are three classifications of rock: igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic. That's how we got our names. In the igneous family there are andesite rocks, felsite rocks, peridotite rocks…"

Over at Iggy's bed, Cherry was peering over her cousin's shoulder as he dumped several rocks wrapped in plastic out of his bag.

"Wow, that's a lot of rocks!"

"They're part of my collection," he droned. "They don't like it when I'm gone for too long, so I had to take them with me."

She lifted one curiously. "What's with all the plastic?"

"It's to protect them. I don't want them to be scratched or chipped."

Meanwhile, Raspberry was looking at a box Metty had unpacked.

"A rock polishing kit?" she said. "You polish rocks?"

Metty nodded, but didn't look at her. Raspberry gasped when she saw a puzzle book.

"Oh, goodie! You remembered! Hey, maybe now that we're older and know more words, we can finish that crossword we started!"

He shrugged as he continued unpacking. Raspberry frowned.

"You're not much of a talker, are you?" No response. "Were you always this quiet? Then again, you were only four last time. I just assumed you were slow to learn." He glanced at her briefly, but still said nothing. "Little shy, huh? That's okay. My boyfriend's a little shy too. I kind of do most of the talking for him. I could do most of the talking for you if you like."

"…obsidian rocks, basalt rocks and volcanic tuff."

Blueberry snorted as she blinked her eyes open. "That's…amazing how you're able to remember…all those rocks."

"Now for the sedimentary rocks."

Blueberry groaned as she flopped her face onto the bed.

"Do you have anything besides rocks in there?" Cherry said as she stared at the large pile on Iggy's bed.

"I got a brush," Iggy said.

"For your mane? Your teeth?"

"For my rocks."

Cherry gritted her teeth together as she tugged on her mane to stop herself from screaming.

"Is there anything else you like to do besides polish rocks?" Raspberry asked Metty.

He held up a book titled *Poetry* .

"Ah, right!" She smiled brightly. "Poetry! I used to read that to you all

the time! What is that? Shakespony? Edgar Allan Pony? Lewis Carrot?"

He moved his hoof to uncover the rest of the title: *Rock Poetry.* Raspberry's face fell.

"Oh. More rocks. Guess you boys really live up to your name, huh?" He was silent as he put his book down. "Not to be rude, but are you mute or something?"

"Who wants cookies?!" Pinkie hollered as she came into the room with a steaming pile of chocolate chip.

"And milk?" Cheese called as he brought in a tray holding six glasses of milk.

"I do, I do, I do!" the Tri-Pies cheered.

The Rock cousins walked silently towards their aunt and uncle and casually took a cookie and glass each. The Tri-Pies watched as the colts bit into their cookies in perfect synchronization, chewed slowly, swallowed, simultaneously sipped their milks, swallowed and bit into their cookies, starting the whole thing all over again.

"What do you think, boys?" Pinkie asked cheerfully.

"Crunchy," said Iggy and Seddie.

Metty merely nodded in approval. The Tri-Pies glanced unceasingly at each other.

"When you're all finished with your snack," Cheese said, "perhaps you girls can show the boys the clubhouse, introduce them to your friends."

The triplets spat out their milk. "What?!"

"Yeah, I'm sure Prism, Gemstone and Lemon Drop would love to meet your cousins!" Pinkie piped.

"We always look forward to meeting new ponies," Iggy said, keeping his deadpan expression.

"Maybe we like the same kinds of rocks," Seddie droned.

Metty nodded silently.

"Um…Mom, Dad?" Blueberry whispered. "Can we talk to you for a moment?"

"Sure!" their parents said.

They smiled down at their daughters.

"Alone?" the Tri-Pies said.

"Oh, of course!" Pinkie said, turning to the boys. "We'll be right back."

They filed out of the room and shut the door.

"Do we *have* to show them to our friends?" Blueberry whined.

"Can't they just stay here all weekend?" Raspberry begged.

Their parents scrunched their muzzles.

"What's wrong?" Pinkie inquired. "Don't you want your cousins to become friends with your friends?"

"It'd be nice," Blueberry said, rubbing her foreleg. "It's just that…"

"We don't think…" Raspberry said, rubbing the back of her neck. "You see…the boys are kind of…"

"Boring," Cherry stated.

"Boring?" Cheese snorted. "How can you say that? They're your cousins! You used to have fun all the time when you were foals!"

"Yeah, *used* to," said Blueberry. "But Seddie talks about nothing but rocks!"

"Iggy's got a whole rock farm in his bag!" Cherry exclaimed.

"Metty says nothing *at all* ," Raspberry huffed.

"And they haven't smiled once since they got here! Are they physically incapable of happiness?!"

"We can't show them to our friends!" Blueberry exclaimed. "They'll be bored to death!"

"Now girls," Pinkie said, kneeling down to them. "Just because you and your cousins have different interests, doesn't mean they're boring. You all managed to find common ground with them as foals, maybe you just need time to find that common ground again."

"And who knows?" Cheese said. "They just might find common ground with your friends. After all, none of them have cutie marks. Shouldn't that be a start?"

"They're your cousins, girls. You don't get to see them very often. Why not just give them a chance?"

The Tri-Pies glanced at each other and sighed.

"Okay, Mom and Dad," said Blueberry.

"We'll give them a chance," said Raspberry.

"Even if they are boring," Cherry murmured.

"That's the spirit!" Pinkie cheered.

"Eh," Cheese said with a shrug. "Close enough."

Since Gemstone had to go home for a piano lesson, only Prism and Lemon Drop were at the clubhouse when the Tri-Pies returned with their cousins. The minute Seddie heard Prism's name, he started scrutinizing her from all angles, even touched her feathers, much to her discomfort.

"Uh, what are you doing?" she finally asked.

"Your name is Prism," he replied as he circled her. "I am merely curious to see if light refracts into a rainbow when it passes through

you, but since you don't appear to be transparent, I can only assume you are named for your multicolored mane and tail."

Prism looked at Blueberry. "Is he always like this?"

She sighed. "It would seem."

On the floor, Metty was polishing some of Iggy's rocks with his kit.

"So…" Raspberry said, shifting in the uncomfortable silence. "You just…dip the brush in the polish there and…brush it on the rocks?"

He said nothing as he continued brushing.

"Just regular old…polish? No colors or anything? Have you considered…painting them?"

He looked up at her, his eyes wide in horror, as if she had just committed blasphemy.

"Okay, okay! No paint! Geez!" She dropped her head into her hooves. "You could at least make conversation."

In the corner, Lemon Drop was showing Iggy his scrapbook of stamps.

"I have a collection too," the unicorn said, pointing to an open page. "See? I got a whole page full of rock stamps!"

"What kind of rocks?" Iggy inquired.

"Uh…I don't know. Gray ones?"

"Let me see," Seddie said, peering over Lemon Drop's shoulder. "Hmm. I can only assume this light gray scribble is supposed to be limestone. My mother would be ashamed. This obsidian here is a better representation of its intended subject. And this boulder here actually stands on our family farm."

"Really?" Lemon Drop asked in wonder.

"It's called Holder's Boulder. It's my mother's prized rock."

"I've got some obsidian and limestone here," Iggy said, showing a black rock and a light gray rock. "I find 'em, Seddie classifies 'em, Metty polishes 'em."

"It's smart that you wrap 'em in plastic," Lemon Drop said.

"And I appreciate how you keep plastic coverings on your pages so they don't get torn or wet."

The unicorn turned to his marefriend. "I like your cousins, Razz!"

Raspberry rolled her eyes. "That makes one of us."

"I can't take it anymore!" Cherry screamed, springing up from the floor. "Let's do something fun! Something that's *not* related to rocks!"

"We could go for a walk," Iggy suggested. "Like we did when we were foals, Cherry."

"A walk," she heaved. "Sure. Whatever. Just as long as…"

"We could look for new rocks for my collection."

The red filly pounded her head against the wall.

"Well, I'm up for getting out of this clubhouse," Prism said. "Why don't we go down to Sugar Cube Corner for some shakes? Do you boys like shakes?"

"Do they have tapioca flavored?" Seddie asked.

Cherry began bawling.

"You guys like tapioca?" Lemon Drop inquired. "Sweet!"

"Divorce him," Blueberry muttered to Raspberry.

The magenta filly pushed her sister away. "Okay, every pony, on to Sugar Cube Corner."

She led her cousins outside, but when they got onto the balcony, they stopped in their tracks. When Raspberry noticed they weren't following her, she looked behind her to see that their jaws had

dropped.

"Hey, you guys coming or what?"

"Who's…" Seddie said.

"… *that* ?" Iggy heaved.

Raspberry followed their gaze. Gemstone was coming up the hill.

"Oh, that's our friend Gemstone."

"Gem…" Seddie breathed.

"… *stone* ?" said Iggy.

"Uh-huh," Raspberry said, cocking her head in confusion. "She's coming back from her piano lesson."

The boys ogled at the white unicorn as she approached the treehouse.

"What going on out here?" Blueberry asked as she and Cherry came out onto the deck.

"I don't know," Raspberry said. "We were headed down the stairs and they just…shutdown."

"Hello!" Cherry said, conking their heads. "Any pony home?!"

"Her eyes are like cornflower corundum," Seddie said in awe.

"Huh?" the Tri-Pies said.

"Her mane," Iggy heaved, "possesses the luster of lapis lazuli."

"Her coat has the smooth complexion of a margaritifera."

"Her horn has the conical characteristics of a stalagmite."

"She's…"

Raspberry stiffened as she heard a third voice and looked at Metty.

"She's…" he murmured through the tiny opening between his lips. "She's…"

"Pulchritudinous," all three of them said in a collective sigh.

"Polka-tooty- *what* -inous?" Cherry questioned.

"It's another word for 'beautiful,'" Blueberry whispered.

"Oh." She gasped. "Wait, does that mean…?"

When they looked back, their cousins had gone. Somehow, they had teleported to the ground while trotting at an extremely slow pace. They met Gemstone at the bottom of the steps.

"Oh, hello," she greeted them politely. "You must be the Tri-Pies' cousins. I'm Gemstone, their friend."

"We know," Iggy said as his eyelids drooped further.

"Our cousins told us all about you," Seddie said as he sluggishly raised his hoof.

The Tri-Pies gawked at their cousins' behavior.

"Are they… *smiling* ?!" Cherry exclaimed.

It was true. The corners of their mouths had turned up just enough to make small, but obvious smiles.

"Sedimentary Rock Pie," Seddie said as he shook Gemstone's hoof. "So nice to meet you, Gemstone."

"And I'm Igneous Rock Pie II," Iggy said as he giddily took her hoof. "And this little one here is…"

"Metamorphic Rock Pie!" Metty piped as he eagerly shook her hoof at a pace which surprised the Tri-Pies. "Call me Metty! Or Morphie! Both are good!"

"Well!" Gemstone exclaimed, pulling her hoof away. "It's so nice to meet all of you!"

"Our cousins were taking us to this place called Sugar Cube Corner," Seddie said.

"Would you like to come with us, Miss Stone?" Iggy inquired.

"Oh, of course!" Gemstone said cheerfully. "I'd love to accompany you. Oh, and you can just call me Gemstone, or Gem."

"Gem," the three colts sighed dreamily.

"Come on. Town is this way."

The Tri-Pies, Prism and Lemon Drop watched in shock and amazement as the Rock Pies followed Gemstone. The three of them almost seemed to be bouncing.

"Well!" Blueberry said, folding her hooves in satisfaction. "That gets them out of our manes for a bit!"

Raspberry giggled. "Who would've thought the boys had it in them, eh?"

Cherry huffed. "They don't stand a chance with her."

"Uh, guys?" Lemon Drop said. "Don't you see the problem here?"

The Tri-Pies turned to their friends.

"What?" Blueberry asked.

"Seriously?" said Prism. "Even *I* can see the danger in this."

Raspberry shrugged. "So our cousins have a little crush on Gemstone, big deal."

"It's not like it'll last," Cherry snorted.

"That's the problem," Lemon Drop said.

"All *three* ," Prism said, rotating her hoof for emphasis, "of your cousins have a crush on *one* Gemstone."

The Tri-Pies glanced at each other. Their expressions turned into

ones of horror as it finally sank in.

"Uh-oh," they said in unison.

That evening, the Rock Pies invited Gemstone over for dinner, which Pinkie and Cheese didn't object to, because they loved having guests. Metty rushed to pull out a chair for Gemstone while Iggy and Seddie took their seats on either side of her. Neither of the boys even touched the rock soup Pinkie had made especially for them because they were too busy staring at the pretty unicorn. Blueberry and Raspberry watched them warily while Cherry chomped furiously on her rock.

"Gemstone?" Iggy said dreamily. "I got you something."

He held up a blue stone with rough edges.

"Oh, it's lovely!" Gemstone exclaimed. "What is it?"

"Lapis lazuli?" Seddie snorted. "How common! You should've gotten her a *real* rock! Behold!" He produced an uncut pink gem. "An alexandrite! One of the rarest stones in the world! It changes color!"

Iggy gawked. "Where did you get that?"

"You're not the *only* one with a collection, cousin."

Gemstone looked down when she felt something touch her side. Metty was holding up a piece of paper, looking shyly at the floor. She took it and frowned at the words.

"Um…I'm dyslexic, so could…?"

"I'll read it!" Iggy volunteered, snatching the paper. "It's a…poem?"

Metty traced circles on the floor with his hoof.

" *Gemstone,*

Your eyes have the rarity

Of cornflower corundum… "

"Hey!" Seddie shouted, slamming his hooves on the table. "That's what *I* said!" He picked up Metty by the mane. "You stole my line!"

"Leave my brother alone!" Iggy said, poking his cousin in the chest.

"He's a plagiarizer!"

"Now, now, boys," Pinkie said. "I'm sure Metty only used that line because he appreciated its…"

"He's using *my* words to flatter Gemstone! *I* was going to tell her that!"

"Better than an alexandrite," Iggy huffed. " *My* gift has a poetic meaning all its own. It possesses the luster of Gemstone's lovely mane."

"But *my* gift has larger monetary value!"

"You put little thought into it!"

"You think you're better than me?!"

Iggy pretended to roll up his sleeves. "Oh, just try it, coz!"

"Bring it on!" Seddie held up his hooves. "You *know* my legs are stronger!"

Metty started kicking both their chairs.

"Hey, no wrestling at the table!" Cheese shouted.

"Well, *I'm* taller!" said Iggy.

" *I'm* smarter!" said Seddie.

"I'm…"

"CUT IT OUT!"

Every pony turned to Cherry as she slammed her hooves firmly onto

the table.

"Listen," Cherry looked between the three boys. "You all like Gemstone. Who wouldn't? She's gorgeous. But you can't tear each other apart over that! You're cousins! You can't let a girl come between you!"

"Is that what this is all about?" Gemstone said. "Thank you, Cherry. I can handle this." She faced the Rock Pies. "Boys, I am truly flattered that you fancy me, but I'm afraid I cannot return either of your affections."

"W-Why not?" Iggy croaked.

"Is it our manes?" Seddie asked. "We can cut them!"

"No," Gemstone said, chuckling slightly. "You see, my father won't allow me to have a coltfriend until I'm fourteen, so even if I liked any of you, I cannot go out with you." She patted their heads. "But you're all wonderful boys. I'm sure you'll make any filly happy one day."

Out of curiosity, Raspberry reached over for the poem and read it over.

"Hey, this is pretty good," she told Metty. "Though your technique could use a little work. If you want, I can give you some pointers."

The smallest colt smiled.

"Can that rock really change color?" Blueberry asked as she eyed the alexandrite.

"Oh, yes," Seddie said proudly. "If you hold it up in the daylight, it will turn green. I can show you after dinner."

"I thought you just collected regular old rocks," Cherry said to Iggy. "Where do you find gems?"

"We have this whole cavern full of them on the rock farm," he explained. "I found this one while Metty and I were playing hide-and-seek and…"

Pinkie and Cheese smiled as the young Pies started talking to each other and they both let out a sigh of relief.

"It's inevitable," Pinkie said, putting her hoof around her husband. "Rocks and Pies mix well together."

After dinner, Gemstone went home and the foals reconvened in the Rock Pies' room. Raspberry and Metty were doing a crossword.

"What is a six-lettered word for a cucumber soaked in brine?" Raspberry asked.

Metty wrote the answer in the boxes.

"That's right, 'pickle!' And what words rhyme with pickle?"

He moved his pencil to the notebook beside the puzzle book and scribbled the words.

"Fickle, tickle, sickle… Good job! You'll be a rhymer in no time! Now what words can you alliterate with 'pickle?'"

Iggy was showing some of the rarest rocks in his collection to Cherry.

"I found this smoky quartz in our basement. It was hiding behind a box of Hearth's Warming decorations."

"Cool!" Cherry said, ogling at the clear black gem. "We once found an alligator in our attic!"

"An alligator?"

"Yeah, apparently Mom's had him since before we were born. He got too big for her room, so she built a habitat for him up there!"

Blueberry was looking through Seddie's microscope.

"This is amazing!" she said. "They're like little crystals!"

"You can tell it's an igneous rock because of its crystalline structure,"

Seddie explained. "That's because igneous rocks are formed by cooling magma inside or on the world's surface."

"Well, everyone," Blueberry said, addressing the room. "I think we've all learned a very important lesson today!"

"Never fall in love with the same pony as your cousins?" Cherry grunted.

"First impressions are always wrong?" Raspberry asked.

Blueberry shook her head. "Rocks are cool!"

"Yeah!" her sisters cheered.

"Yeah," the boys said monotonously.

Okay, maybe I've been watching too much "Steven Universe" lately.

Lonely Apples Club

This is short, but it's the night before classes and I had to get this down!

It was a regular old day at Sweet Apple Acres. Granny Smith was in the house watching baby Applespike, Cinnamon Stick was baking muffins, Spike was feeding the livestock and Applejack and Cinnamon Roll were harvesting apples. But when Cinnamon Roll came to the next group of trees, she found Cherry Pie beneath one of them, standing on her head against the trunk and wearing a grim expression on her upside-down face.

"Well, lookie what we got here," Cinnamon Roll said, tilting her head so she could see the filly right-side-up. "And here I was comin' to harvest apples. Who knew there were cherries here too?"

Cherry rolled her eyes.

"Ain't there usually two more of ya?"

"It's just me today," the red filly said, wiggling her back hooves.

Since her neck was getting sore, Cinnamon Roll brought her head back up and walked over to another tree that was facing Cherry's. She placed her hooves at the base of the trunk and kicked up her back legs so that she was in the same position as the younger filly.

"What's up, buttercup?"

Seeing that she was making an effort, Cherry sighed in relent. "I have this…friend, you see, who likes this other friend who doesn't like the first friend and doesn't even know the first friend likes her and can't stop thinking about her no matter how hard she tries and can't even talk to her sisters about it because she's not sure they would even understand. What should she do?"

Cinnamon Roll scrutinized her. Then she flipped down, raised her front hoof to her mouth and whistled. Spike, Applejack and Cinnamon Stick came running and Cinnamon Roll quickly repeated Cherry's dilemma.

"Mmm-hmm," Applejack said thoughtfully, looking at the red filly. "Ya like someone who doesn't like ya back, huh?"

"No," Cherry said, blushing. "A *friend* of mine likes someone who doesn't like her back."

"Uh-huh," Spike said with a knowing smile. "Well, you're in luck, kid. It just so happens our family has a tendency for unrequited love."

She lowered her back hooves and twisted into a sitting position. "How do you get over it?"

Applejack shrugged. "Say nothin' and wait for the feelin' to go away."

"Hope that someday she will notice you," Cinnamon Stick grumbled.

"Wait on her and pamper her and worship the ground she walks on and pray to a doll you had custom-made in her image that she will…"

Every pony, especially Applejack, gave Spike a strange look.

"I mean," he coughed, throwing his arm around his wife. "Realize that there are other fish in the sea and love again."

"But I…" Cherry stammered. "My *friend* can't just wait for the feeling to go away. That could take forever! And making a doll is just plain creepy. And what if *no pony* ever catches my… *friend's* eye?"

Cinnamon Roll shook her head at her folks. "Y'all are goin' about it the wrong way. Y'all actually *got* yerr unrequited loves." She looked at her father. "And it took a datin' game set up by Uncle Discord to get ya over *yours* . What Cherry needs is advice from some pony who got over their crush all on their own, without any other loves comin' in the mix."

She turned to Cherry and sat beside her. "Let me let ya in on a lil'

secret. Some time ago, when I was just around yerr age, I had a crush on Thunder Dash."

"You *did* ?!" Cinnamon Stick gasped.

"Shut up, big brother, it was no big deal. I couldn't really help it. He was over all the time and was nice to me. But the thing is I knew he had a thing for my cousin, even though I prayed he'd one day notice me. After a while, I realized I was just a kid to him, but it took a little more than that for me to get over it."

Cherry leaned toward her in interest. "What did you do?"

The older filly smirked. "Why don't ya invite yerr friend over and I'll show her?"

Seeing that she was caught, Cherry sighed and held her hooves up in surrender. "It's me, okay?"

"No kiddin'!" Cinnamon Roll said in pretend surprise.

"Yes. So what do I have to do?"

Cinnamon Roll turned to her family. "I got this."

They nodded and left the two of them alone.

"Okay," the older filly said, picking up an apple. "Pretend this apple is yerr crush."

Cherry squinted at it. "Okay. Now what?"

Smirking, Cinnamon Roll stood up, tossed the apple into the air, flicked her tail and sent the apple flying into the nearest tree. Cherry's jaw dropped as the fruit exploded into yellow juice.

"Get the picture?" Cinnamon Roll said, tossing Cherry another apple. "Now you try."

The younger filly stared at the apple in her hoof and then at the one in shambles. She raised her hoof to throw it, but then winced.

"I can't do it!" she screamed, dropping the apple as she covered her face. "I can't kill her!"

Cinnamon Roll groaned, but remained sympathetic. "It's okay. Maybe that was a lil' too abrupt. We'll try somethin' simpler." She knelt down to her. "Are ya thinkin' of yerr crush now?"

"Yes."

She surprised the younger filly by pulling on her tail and snapping it back into her flank.

"Ow!" Cherry cried. "What was that for?"

"It's called positive punishment," Cinnamon Roll stated. "Every time ya think of yerr crush, yerr tail gets pulled."

"How is *this* going to help?"

"Are ya thinkin' of her?"

"Yes, but…" *Snap!* "Ow!"

"How 'bout now?"

"Kinda hard not to when we're trying to—OW!"

"Now?"

"Of course she is when—OW! You know this is borderline abuse!"

"Fair point," Cinnamon Roll said, holding up her hooves. "That was crossin' the line. I got a better idea."

Cherry grunted as she bucked the last apple tree. As the fruit fell, she panted and wiped the sweat from her brow.

"Is that it?" she heaved.

"Yup," Cinnamon Roll said, nodding in approval. "Ya did good work."

"How was that supposed to help?"

"Work gets yerr mind off other things. Plus it gets the chores done. How do ya feel now?"

Cherry sighed. "I feel like my crush would've hated all this as much as I do."

Cinnamon Roll groaned. "Okay. We tried visualization, operative conditionin', and hard work."

"Any other ideas?"

"Well, we could hang ya upside-down from a tree and turn ya three times while yerr drinkin' cider and…"

"Stop!" the younger filly cried, holding up her hoof. "Before we go any further, let me just say one thing. What if I'm not meant to get over this crush? What if…what if I'm doomed to pine over it forever? Or," a glimmer of hope sprang in her eye, "what if it'll work out in the future and…?"

"Stop." It was Cinnamon Roll's turn to hold up her hoof. "If ya wanna get over some pony, ya *never* think about what might've been or what could be! Ya gotta learn to accept that some things just aren't meant to be!"

"But what if it *is* ?!"

The older filly rubbed her chin and glanced around. When she saw a stray apple, she smiled.

"I have an idea," she said, picking up the apple. "I want ya to throw this…"

"Oh no!" Cherry exclaimed, backing away. "Not more apple throwing!"

"This is different. I want ya to throw it over yerr shoulder, not into a tree, but down that hill there. If it lands stem-up, then it's meant to be. If it lands stem-down, then it isn't. And it can be either way, cuz the stem is short."

She looked warily at the apple. "You sure this has fortune-telling abilities?"

Cinnamon Roll shrugged. "Wouldn't hurt to try."

Gulping, Cherry took the apple, faced away from the edge of the hill, took a deep breath and threw the fruit over her shoulder. She could hear it thump as it rolled down the hill, and each thump rang in her ears. When the thumping stopped, she was afraid to look.

"Where did it land?"

Cinnamon Roll turned to her. Her expression was unreadable.

"Do ya *really* wanna know?"

Wincing, Cherry pondered on it. Then, as she opened her eyes, a strange sense of release washed over her.

"No," she muttered. "No." She faced her friend. "I'm not gonna let some apple make decisions for me. If it's meant to be, it'll happen, but for now…I need to stop worrying if it will or won't. Like Uncle Spike said, there are other fish in the sea. Even if there are no fish for me, I'm a big girl and I shouldn't cry over it. I should just move on."

Cinnamon Roll grinned. "Told ya it would work."

Once Cherry figured out what she meant, she gasped. "Oh, you're good."

After shaking the older filly's hoof, Cherry hopped happily down the hill. The minute she was at the bottom, Cinnamon Stick started coming up the other side.

"How'd it go, sis?"

"I think we made progress." His sister raised her head proudly. "I'm just that good."

Cinnamon Stick looked down as his hoof bumped into something.

"Ugh, these apples," he said as he picked it up. "Don't you hate how they get everywhere?"

Cinnamon Roll grinned at the apple. "Not this one."

Her brother raised an eyebrow as she laughed. Scratching his head, he examined the apple to see what was so special about it.

"I…guess you're right," he said unsurely. "At least this one landed right-side-up."

I felt Cherry needed to confide in someone else, and I haven't done much with the Cinnamon siblings, especially Cinnamon Roll. Also the realization I made about the Apple family in my universe was astonishing.

Whinny Land

Whinny Land was the Number One amusement park in all of Equestria, and the Cutie Mark Crusaders were thrilled that they were able to come on this Saturday afternoon. The first-generation Cutie Mark Crusaders were playing a concert later this evening and had offered to take their nieces and nephews. Unfortunately, most of their family members were busy and the only ones able to come were Prism and Gemstone. The Tri-Pies were invited too since it would be unfair not to include them.

By three o'clock, the adults' hooves were filled with stuffed animals that had been bought and won (mostly by the Tri-Pies) and the fillies were nibbling on cotton candy.

"Man, the twins don't know what they're missing!" Prism said, taking a huge chunk out of her treat.

"I'm glad you brought us along, Aunt Sweetie Belle," Gemstone said. "I hardly get to spend much time with you."

"I know," Sweetie Belle said. "Sorry about that. It's just I've been writing songs for our new album."

"Ooh, how's that going?" Blueberry asked.

"Great, but our managers Snips and Snails think we should include a love song, because like ninety percent of the songs in the world are about love."

"Awwwwwwww!" Raspberry cooed. "I love a good love song!"

"Me too, but…lately I haven't really been inspired."

"Is it because you don't have a boyfriend or girlfriend?" Cherry chimed.

"Cherry, that's not nice!" Raspberry said, scowling.

"No, she's right." Sweetie Belle shrugged. "I haven't been on a date since Featherweight, and that was years ago!"

"Really?" Gemstone asked, tilting her head. "I would've thought you'd have a lot of stallions asking you out, Aunt Sweetie Belle. I mean not only are you gorgeous, but you're a celebrity!"

"I think that's just the thing. You wouldn't believe how many big-time celebrities have asked me out, even Justin Beaver."

Prism snorted. "Ponies still listen to that guy?"

"I don't wanna date some rock star. I want…well, I don't know what I want."

Sweetie Belle was silent for a moment and then put on a big smile. "Okay, enough about my nonexistent love life. What do you girls wanna do next?"

"Ooh, there's an arcade!" Cherry said, pointing. "Hey, Blue! Bet ya can't beat my skeeball score!"

"You're on, sis!" Blueberry said.

The two of them bolted into the arcade tent and the other fillies followed.

"Guess we're playing some games," Scootaloo said with a shrug.

The rock stars were about to go in when two unicorn stallions in dark suits and sunglasses, one tall and skinny and one short and stout, zipped into their path.

"There you girls are!" Snips said.

"We've been looking everywhere for you!" said Snails.

"We need you at the stage for sound check! Stat!"

"Can't we do it later, boys?" Scootaloo groaned. "We can't leave the fillies all by themselves."

"Aw, they'll be fine," said Snails. "They're like, what? Thirteen? We were *way* younger when our parents let us wander around by ourselves."

"Well I better get down there," said Apple Bloom. "The tech is my gig."

"And I better see if my keytar works," said Scootaloo.

"I don't have an instrument," Sweetie Belle said. "And you don't need my voice to check the mic. How about you two go down to the stage, I stay with the girls and meet you later?" She turned to their managers. "Is that fine with you, boys?"

Snips and Snails looked at each other and muttered a few words.

"As long as you're at the stage by five so we can rehearse," said Snips.

"Deal," Sweetie Belle said.

"You sure you can handle all five of them?" Scootaloo whispered. "I mean I'm used to watching them but…"

"Relax. I've had to babysit both my nieces. It'll be no trouble at all."

"Okay then, Sweetie Belle," said Apple Bloom. "We'll see ya."

As her friends and managers left, Sweetie Belle went into the arcade tent to find the fillies. Then she stopped when she saw a grown stallion playing a video game. He was a brown earth pony with auburn hair and eyes, wearing a blue blazer. His cutie mark was a yellow joystick with a round red handle.

"Take that, skeletons!" he yelled at the game. "Thou shalt face the wrath of my blade! Heeyaw!"

Smirking, Sweetie Belle crept up behind the stallion. She watched the screen as his knight character sliced an 8-bit animated skeleton in half.

"Nice job there."

"Gah!"

The stallion jumped, distracting him long enough for a zombie to bite into his character's head. The words 'Game Over' flashed in red.

"No, no, no!" he screamed. "Ugh! Thanks a lot, lady, you made me lose the…"

But when he turned around his eyes widened. Sweetie Belle was trying to contain her laughter.

"Sorry, Button, I couldn't resist."

"Sweetie Belle?" He scoffed. "I can't believe it! How long's it been?"

"Too long, if you ask me. I tried looking you up in Ponyville, but your mom said you had gone to Applewood."

"Yup," he said, proudly straightening his jacket. "I'm actually the CEO of a video game company."

"Seriously?!"

"Uh-huh. That's why I'm here. I like to see for myself if there are any glitches."

She shook her head with a chuckle. "You always were one for video games. Looks like things turned out well for you."

"You too. I have all your albums."

She blushed. "I could sign them for you if you'd like."

"Oh, darn!" He stomped his hoof. "If I had known, I would've brought them with me!"

While they laughed, Gemstone was acing a dance game not too far away.

"Well what do you know?" she said as she beat the high score. "My dancing lessons with Cherry paid off!"

She looked to her opponent, whose head was down. Gemstone

suddenly lost the urge to gloat.

"What's wrong, Raspberry? I thought you loved this game."

Raspberry sighed. "Sorry, Gem. I'm just sad my little Lemony Drop couldn't come here with us. It was too bad his moms had already planned a trip to Manehattan this weekend."

The unicorn laid a hoof on her friend's shoulder. "Oh, I understand it can be hard to be away from your special some pony…"

She rolled her eyes. "How would you know? You don't have a special some pony."

Gemstone stiffened. "Well, now! That was uncalled for!"

"Sorry again. I know your dad doesn't allow you to have boyfriends."

After making a quick glance around the arcade, Gemstone leaned in towards Raspberry and whispered, "Can you keep a secret?"

"Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye," Raspberry said, making the gesture.

Leaning in closer, the unicorn muttered, "Daddy never really said that. He actually trusts me. I just made that up so I could reject colts politely."

Her friend's eyes widened. "You mean…every time you put a colt down…?"

"I just simply didn't like them."

"But what about Dunkin? You're always hanging out with him."

"Dunkin's a sweetheart, but…I don't know. I'm not really prepared to be courting right now. I mean there's so much going on in my life. I have my baby sister, piano lessons, the Cutie Mark Crusaders, my dyslexia. I'm not like you, Raspberry. I can't juggle so many things around."

"So…you *don't* want a coltfriend?"

"Maybe someday. I don't know. It's not that I don't enjoy ro—who's that over there with Aunt Sweetie Belle?"

Raspberry followed her gaze and gasped when she saw Sweetie Belle laughing with a strange brown stallion. She sniffed the air.

"I smell romance! Let's go meddle!"

She bounced over to the couple and Gemstone followed her.

"Oh, there you are, Gem!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed. "Button, this is my niece Gemstone and her friend Raspberry Pie."

"Any relation to *Pinkie* Pie?" Button asked.

"I'm her daughter!" Raspberry said. "One of them, anyway. My sisters are around here somewhere."

"Girls, this is Button Mash," Sweetie Belle said. "We went to school together."

"Maybe you two can help me," Button said, kneeling down to the fillies. "I'm CEO of a video game company and I'm trying to widen my audience. Do you know how I can get more fillies interested in my games?"

Raspberry tapped her chin. "I'd say have more girl avatars. I don't mind playing as a boy, but it'd be nice to play a girl character every now and then because I am a girl and it'd be cool to see one kicking bad guy butt! The girl doesn't *always* have to be the one in trouble."

He nodded. "That's a very good point. I hadn't thought about it that way."

"I guess there are so many damsels in video games," Sweetie Belle said with a wink, "because most young boys wanna save the girl."

"Well," Button said as he rubbed the back of his neck, "pretty girls are…worth saving."

As he and Sweetie Belle made eye contact, their cheeks reddened and Gemstone and Raspberry glanced excitedly at each other.

Button suddenly gasped.

"Oh my gosh!"

Then he rushed off, making all three girls frown.

"Was it something she said?" Gemstone whispered.

Sweetie Belle shrugged. "I'm sure Button's just busy now that he's a big important CEO. I get that."

"Out of curiosity," Raspberry said with a smirk, "was he your boyfriend?"

"What?!" The mare blushed. "Oh, no, no, no, no! Button and I were just friends. I mean…we used to play video games together and get milkshakes at Sugar Cube Corner." She smiled. "I don't know, I mean I sometimes thought we'd…" She gasped. "Oh my gosh!"

She started to rush out of the tent but then quickly went back to the fillies and said, "If you need me, I'll be on that bench over there!"

Gemstone and Raspberry watched the mare confusingly as she ran off excitedly. They turned to each other.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" Raspberry asked.

The unicorn nodded. "I've never seen Aunt Sweetie Belle so flustered! They *obviously* have a thing for each other!"

"It's the classic childhood friend who comes back a big success and all grown up and totally handsome scenario!" She sighed dreamily. "So romantic!"

"Strange though, isn't it? They were obviously pleased to see each other but couldn't quite express their feelings."

"Well you know. Some ponies don't know what they're feeling when they're feeling it. Of course I knew my little Lemony Drop was the one for me right away. Some ponies just need a little nudge." She gasped. "We should totally set them up!"

Gemstone tapped her chin. "I don't know. Don't these things take time?"

"This is an immense tourist attraction! She's here on vacation! Who knows when they're gonna see each other again?! If they're ever going to realize their feelings, we have to act *now* ! So, are you in, Gem?"

"Well…"

"Come on, don't you want your aunt to be happy?"

The unicorn smiled at the thought of her aunt cuddling up to the colt. "I'm in."

"Operation: ButtonBelle is a go!"

They sealed it with a hoof bump.

"So what do you girls want to do now?" Sweetie Belle asked when the fillies came out of the arcade.

"We haven't gone on Nightmare Moon Mountain yet!" Prism said.

"Eh," Cherry said with a huff. "We went on that thing fifty times when we were little. It gets boring."

"Gem, you coming?"

"No thank you," Gemstone said with a shiver. "I haven't really been comfortable with roller coasters since that incident at Uncle Discord's."

Prism turned to their chaperone. "Sweetie Belle, is it okay if I go alone?"

"You can go ahead," Sweetie Belle said. "But as soon as the ride's done, you are going to wait for us at the exit. Do not try and look for us."

"Can do!"

The pegasus filly galloped into the line for the space-themed ride.

"Can we go to the Haunted Stable while we're waiting for her?" Blueberry begged.

"Ooh, I heard that ride's scary!" Cherry chimed.

"No scary rides!" Gemstone said.

"I'm with Gem," said Raspberry, winking at her. "We have…other plans."

"You two can go to the Haunted Stable," Sweetie Belle said, "but wait at the exit for us."

"See ya!" Blueberry and Cherry called as they trotted up to a tall, frightening black barn.

"So what do you two want to do?" Sweetie Belle asked the remaining fillies.

"Hey, look at that!" Raspberry pointed. "The Tunnel of Love! Doesn't that sound great, Gemstone?"

"Hmm?" Gemstone said as Raspberry nudged her. "Oh! Yes! That sounds…fun!"

Sweetie Belle raised an eyebrow. "Not judging, but don't you have a boyfriend, Raspberry?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" Raspberry said, waving her hoof. "This isn't for romantic purposes! This is for Gemstone!"

"Me?" Gemstone questioned.

"Of course! You don't like roller coasters and you don't like scary rides! The Tunnel of Love is a riverboat ride with no sharp turns or loops, and it's full of mushy gushy decorations, ergo not scary! It's the perfect ride for you!"

The unicorn filly caught her drift. "Yes, you're right! That's the perfect ride for me!"

Sweetie Belle scratched her head. "Well…okay. I'm certainly gonna be asked a lot of questions about this."

She followed them to the Tunnel of Love, a pink building with a large heart framing the entrance. The line was filled with young pony couples holding hooves, but the pony at the end of it stood alone. Sweetie Belle's eyes widened when she saw who it was.

"Button? What are you doing here?"

"What are you talking about?" Button said. "Didn't you want us to meet here?"

She scrunched her muzzle. "What?"

"That Raspberry filly told me you wanted to meet me here precisely at 4:03PM."

"Did she now?" Sweetie Belle said as she glared down at the earth filly.

"Oh, would you look at that?" Raspberry said, squeaking. "The line's moving!" She began pushing the two adults towards the ride. "We better hoof it!"

Button looked strangely at Sweetie Belle. "Any idea what's going on?"

"I have a few," she replied as she continued to glare at the fillies.

"Man!" Cherry groaned. "This line is taking forever!"

"It'll all be worth it once we see the ghosts." Blueberry squealed. "Ooh, imagine! Real live ghosts!"

Cherry tilted her head. "Uh, Blue? You do realize this isn't a *real* haunted barn, right?"

"That's what you think, but I've heard stories about fillies and colts who loved this ride so much, when they died young, their parents sprinkled their ashes on the ride and the foals' spirits haunt the place. Also there's this one animatronic called the Headless Ghost, it's this headless horse in a cape who walks around carrying his head. It was only on the ride for a week, before it mysteriously disappeared. Not even the engineers who built the ride knew what happened to it. But some claim they saw the animatronic in the bride's basement where it originally stood."

"Ooh, creepy."

"Some say these are just legends, but I intend to prove them wrong! I mean right! I mean…this place is really haunted!"

"But how can you prove it? There are a lot of fake ghosts in there, there's no way you can tell which ones are real, especially if you're riding through it."

"That's the best part." Blueberry smirked. "We *won't* be riding through it."

Her sister raised an eyebrow. "What are you talking about?"

Whispering in her ear, Blueberry explained her plan and Cherry listened with wide eyes.

"Gee, I don't know, Blue. We might get in trouble." She grinned and rubbed her hooves together mischievously. "Let's do it!"

Prism let out a sigh of relief when she finally reached the track with the rocket-shaped carts, but when she stepped up to it the ride attendant held up his hoof.

"Sorry, kid, we don't allow single riders. You and that colt over there are gonna have to ride together."

He pointed to the colt standing off to the side and Prism gasped. Kicks waved weakly.

"H-Hi Penguin."

"No!" Prism looked pleadingly at the stallion. "You *can't* let me ride with him!"

He rolled his eyes with a groan. "Look, kid. I got a lot of ponies here waiting. Don't hold up the line."

Prism hung her head as she went to the next empty pair of seats. Kicks excitedly sat beside her.

"Won't this be great? The two of us." He yawned as he stretched his foreleg towards her. "On a ride together."

"Touch me and you die," she snapped.

"Okay," he squeaked as he tucked his hooves into his lap. "Still, fancy meeting you here in Whinny Land."

"If you've reduced to stalking me…"

"No, no, no!" He held up his hooves. "I seriously had no idea you'd be here! My parents are just in Applewood for a kickboxing tournament. They're practicing for the finals tomorrow and they dropped my sister and me off here."

She looked at him. "Where's your sister?"

He bit his lip. "She's…"

He was cut off as the ride attendant pushed the safety bar down on their laps. Another attendant spoke through a megaphone.

"Alright, ponies. Remember to keep your hooves, tails and wings inside the vehicle at all times. Pegasi, don't try to fly out of the cart. Unicorns, don't use your magic to make the ride go faster or slower or stop or do loop de loops or any magical tampering of any sort. Thank you and enjoy the ride."

The rocket train started and slowly rolled towards the dark tunnel ahead.

"Look, you don't have to talk to me," Kicks said. "This ride doesn't take very long so just try to enjoy it, okay?"

Prism groaned. "Fine."

As the train entered the tunnel, it dropped forward and Prism clung to the safety bar as the ride accelerated. She and Kicks screamed out of instinct. They found themselves in an endless night sky with an infinite amount of stars. The whizzed past planets and suns.

"This ride is so cool!" Prism shouted.

She screamed louder as they went into a loop de loop but then shrieked when the train suddenly came to a halt at the top of the loop. Every pony was upside-down.

" *Sorry, folks, we seem to be experiencing some technical difficulties. Please remain in your seats and we will be restarting momentarily.* "

Prism glared at Kicks. "When we get off of this ride, you're so dead."

"Oh come on!" he whined. "You don't seriously think I *planned* this!"

"I give 'em pointers for the special effects," Cherry said as she gazed down at the ballroom full of dancing ghosts.

"Eh," Blueberry said, waving her hoof. "They're just cheap projections cast by some unicorn workers. They're not the *real* ghosts we're looking for. Hmm, let's see." She glanced around, curving her neck to look behind the buggy they were in. "If my calculations are correct, we should be descending into the bride's basement in three…two…"

The buggy turned and slowly dropped down into a dark room filled with boxes and tattered paintings. The fillies' ears were filled with the sound of a beating heart as they approached a ghostly figure dressed in a wedding gown, holding out a bouquet of dead flowers and a candelabrum.

"This is it," Blueberry said, pointing past the bride. "The last known sighting of the Headless Ghost was right there." She held her hoof out toward her sister. "Screwdriver."

Reaching into her mane, Cherry pulled out a small screwdriver and handed it to Blueberry. She took it and went to work on the screws of the safety bar.

"Lefty-loosy…" she murmured. "Quarter-turn to the right and… done!"

With a click, the safety bar popped up, allowing the two fillies to slip out of the moving buggy.

"Quick!" Blueberry whispered. "Hide behind that pile of Styrofoam suitcases!"

With one swift leap, they ducked behind the fake suitcases and snickered as they watched their empty buggy disappear around the corner.

"Okay, now let's go find that ghost," Blueberry said, taking her sister's hoof.

"But where?" Cherry asked. "I mean there's not like there's a trapdoor that leads to a secret tunnel that…oh wait, there's one there."

Sure enough, there was a trapdoor embedded in the floor. The two fillies slowly lifted it up to find a dark tunnel with a ladder.

"Age before beauty," Blueberry said as she began descending the ladder.

"You're only older than me by seven minutes!" Cherry whispered as she followed her.

"It's still enough to make me the oldest, therefore making *me* the responsible one. Therefore, it is my sworn duty as the responsible one to go down this creepy ladder first so that in the event that the ghost shows up he'll attack *me* giving my baby sister time to get away."

Cherry grinned. "You really *are* the responsible one."

When they reached the bottom, Blueberry held out her hoof, saying, "Flashlight."

Cherry handed her a flashlight which she had taken out of her mane. Switching it on, Blueberry illuminated their surroundings.

"Look at all the pulleys and cogs and controls and mechanical junk," Cherry said.

"We must be in one of the control rooms for the ride," Blueberry said. "Though judging by the cobwebs, it looks really old."

"Hey, Blue, check it out!"

Cherry pointed to a large red button on the wall. Underneath it was a dusty metal plate. Blueberry brushed the dust away with her hoof and gasped. The plate read: "Headless Ghost."

"This must've been the button they used to operate the animatronic!" Blueberry exclaimed. "I don't think it's been pressed in years!"

"Ooh, creepy," Cherry said with a shiver. "Let's press it!"

"What? You crazy?"

Cherry blinked. "Have you *met* our family?"

Blueberry rolled her eyes. "I'm just saying, there's no telling what this button will do now that the Headless Ghost has disappeared."

"But if the animatronic's been missing for years, then we have nothing to worry about, right?"

"Unless…" Blueberry's eyes widened. "It'll actually make the Headless Ghost appear!"

Cherry's hoof reached for the button, but Blueberry stopped it.

"I'm not letting you take this moment from me," the older triplet said. "We'll do it together."

With a nod, the two sisters slowly raised their hooves towards the button, lightly touched it, then pressed down on it with a *click!*

They waited for something to happen. After twenty seconds, they glanced around in confusion.

"Huh," Blueberry said. "I guess it really *doesn't* do any—"

"What are you doing down here?"

As the fillies spun around, the flashlight shone on the silhouette of a stallion's body…but they couldn't make out his head. The girls screamed as Blueberry dropped the flashlight.

"IT'S THE HEADLESS GHOST!" they shouted as they embraced each other.

"If this is the end Cherry, I just want you to know," Blueberry said with a gulp, "I'm the one who ate the last chimmy-cherry-changa!"

"That's okay, Blue!" Cherry exclaimed. "Cuz I ate the stack of blueberry pancakes you hide under your bed!"

"I broke your party cannon!"

"I'm the one who let the gator out!"

"I still pick my nose when no pony's looking!"

"I'm in love with Gemstone!"

"I…" Blueberry looked at her. "Wait, what?"

Just then, a light switched on. Standing over by the ladder, his hoof on a switch, was a tall, lean stallion draped in a black cloak. His coat was a dark blue, his eyes were pitch black and his head had no mane. He looked down at the fillies sternly.

"Hey, you're no Headless Ghost!" Blueberry said. "Your head is right there where it should be!"

"Phew!" Cherry said, sighing in relief. "Wait. You broke my party

cannon?"

"What is all this nonsense about a Headless Ghost?" the stallion asked. "And again, what are you doing down here? This is a restricted area."

Blueberry and Cherry crossed their back hooves in embarrassment.

"Gee," the latter said, "we're awfully sorry, Mister…"

"You may call me," the stallion said with a slight bow, "H.G."

Blueberry gasped. "Like H.G. Wills, the science-fiction writer?"

"No," he said bluntly.

"Oh. That would've been cool."

"You work here, H.G.?" Cherry asked.

"You could say that," H.G. said, running his hoof along the wall. "I've been here since before this attraction opened." He looked back to them. "But you still haven't answered my question. What are you doing down here?"

"We didn't mean to cause trouble," Cherry said.

"We were just looking for the Headless Ghost," Blueberry said. "You know, that animatronic that disappeared a week after the attraction opened?"

"Ah, yes," H.G. said with a nod. "He's become quite a legend around here. I remember back when that ghost was functioning properly."

Blueberry gasped. "You've *seen* the Headless Ghost?"

"Indeed. But every now and then, he would break down. The ghost's head would fall out of his hoof, making him look more comical than frightening." He sighed. "The guests would not stop laughing throughout the rest of the ride."

"Gee," Cherry said. "That mustn't've been fun for the ghost."

"I imagine it wasn't."

"So do you know what happened to it?" Blueberry asked. "Have you seen it since it disappeared? Is it possible that it may actually be a *real* ghost?"

His expression was unreadable. "And if he *was* a real ghost, why do you wish to know so badly?"

Cherry shrugged. "Seeing a ghost would be really cool, I guess."

Blueberry sighed. "I just wanna find out what happened to the animatronic, why it disappeared, because…well, it's a question no pony's been able to answer, and I'd like to be the one to answer it." She picked up the flashlight. "It's like when I saw that picture of my mom with that strange Cheese Sandwich guy. Turns out it was my dad before he went into hiding and went through a bizarre identity crisis. When I have a question…I want an answer, you know?"

She felt a hoof on her shoulder and she looked up at H.G. He gave her a small smile.

"I *do* know, little one," he said. "You're an explorer, and explorers have inquisitive minds." He lowered his hoof. "But has it ever occurred to you that perhaps the Headless Ghost doesn't *want* to be found?"

She scrunched her muzzle. "What do you mean?"

The stallion looked up at the ceiling. "Ponies laughed at him because he didn't work properly. It must have been torment for him. He was meant to frighten ponies, not make them laugh." He returned his gaze to her. "Now that he's gone, now that he's draped in mystery, he is not so comedic anymore. Perhaps he would like it to stay that way."

"Gee," Blueberry said, tapping her chin. "Hadn't thought about it like that. But wait. Are you saying that…the animatronic had a mind of its own?"

He was silent for a moment. "What do *you* think?"

Blueberry blinked. "I think…maybe some mysteries are…better left unsolved." She grinned. "They're a lot more interesting that way."

"What do these gears and pulleys do, anyway?" Cherry asked, leaning towards one of the moving mechanisms.

"Get away from there!" H.G. shouted, grabbing her. "You could lose your head that way!"

Cringing, Cherry said, "Mom and Dad would really ground me if I did that."

H.G. gave Blueberry a look that said, "Seriously?"

"Our family's not very good at getting their priorities straight," Blueberry said with a shrug.

Setting Cherry down, H.G. said, "If I show you the way out, will you promise to leave me alone and not touch anything else?"

"Ooh!" Cherry exclaimed, clapping her hooves together. "Can we take advantage of our situation and scare a few ponies first?"

H.G. stared at her hard.

"Like I said," Blueberry said, "priorities." She grinned brightly. "Although…if we *really* wanna keep the Headless Ghost legend alive, my sister and I would be happy to…help it along."

After a moment of silence, H.G. smiled slightly. "Exactly what did you have in mind?"

Meanwhile, Nightmare Moon Mountain was being evacuated. Pegasi security officers were helping the passengers out of their upside-down seats.

"Can you kids fly?" one of the officers asked Prism and Kicks.

"I can," Kicks said, pointing to Prism. "She can't."

"Okay then." He flew over to Prism and held up his hooves. "Grab hold of me. As soon as my colleague disables the safety bar, I'm going to carry you to the catwalk." He turned to Kicks. "You can just fly right out, but stay close to me."

A pegasus mare disabled the safety bar by using a screwdriver in her mouth. Prism quickly threw her hooves around the stallion's neck and dropped into his hooves. Kicks flew swiftly out and held his head once he was right-side-up again.

"Yeesh," he said, his eyes rolling all around. "That's a lot of blood rushing to the head."

The non-flying passengers were placed on a catwalk and escorted to an emergency exit.

"Your parents on this ride?" the stallion asked the kids once they were outside.

"My chaperone's taking my friends on some other ride," Prism said. "She told me to wait at the exit."

"Err," Kicks said, biting his lip. "Yeah! What she said!"

"I see," the officer said with a smile. "Not all parents are able to go on the same rides as their kids." He pointed over to a bench against the wall of the ride. "Just wait over there until your folks come." He bent down to whisper, "If any pony strange comes up to you, I'll be standing guard over there."

"Thanks," Prism said, walking over to the bench.

When she sat down, she noticed Kicks taking a seat beside her, which made her scowl.

"What?" Kicks said. "This isn't stalking you! I'm alone in this park too!"

"Whaddya mean?" Prism asked. "What about your sister?"

Kicks hung his head. "She's hanging out with her boyfriend. They've been in a long-distance relationship for a while and he lives here in

Applewood. She said she wanted time alone with him since she hardly gets to see him."

She turned to him in surprise. "And…she's left you all alone?"

"Not really," Kicks said. "I mean she gave me some snack money and told me not to talk to strangers and to meet her outside this ride at five so we have time to grab seats for the CMC show later."

Prism was silent for a moment. "I can't believe your sister would just leave you like that."

He shrugged. "I'm used to being on my own. After all, my parents are always busy training and my sister has her own stuff to do."

She sighed. "I know what that feels like. Even before my parents went off to Afghanisteed, they were always off with the Wonderbolts, and the twins are usually hanging out with their pals." She flopped her head onto her hoof. "Even Aunt Scootaloo has her band."

"Looks like your Crusader friends abandoned you too."

She shot him a dangerous look.

"Sorry, not helping."

She turned her back to him and neither of them said anything for a while. Kicks glanced over at a clock on the wall of Nightmare Moon Mountain and then at the Haunted Stable ride nearby.

"You know," he said, "I don't have to meet my sister for another half hour, and it doesn't look like your friends are back from their rides yet, so…" He grinned slyly. "What say we take a quick ride through the Haunted Stable?"

Prism looked back at him with a cocked eyebrow. "You trying to get me alone in the dark or something?"

"No, no, no! I just thought…" He twiddled his hooves. "Since I'm alone and you're alone, and we've got some time, we might as well…make the most of it, you know?"

"I don't know," Prism said, glancing around. "What if Sweetie Belle comes and I'm not here?"

"Just tell her you were coming back from the bathroom. You can't help the call of nature, after all."

"Still," she said, looking back at the Haunted Stable, "that line is pretty long. We might not make it back in time."

"So we just take the Single Riders' line, which is ten times shorter, and pretend we're not together."

She crossed her hooves. "We *aren't* together."

He leaned forward to whisper, "Exactly."

She smiled once she caught his drift. "Okay. At least you're not suggesting the Tunnel of Love."

"Please," Kicks said with a huff as he hopped off the bench. "Like *you'd* be into that mushy stuff."

Her grin widened as she followed him. "Maybe you *do* get me."

As soon as they were at the front of the line, Gemstone and Raspberry shoved Sweetie Belle and Button Mash into the swan boat.

"Go on, hurry up!" Raspberry said. "Can't leave the swan waiting!"

"Don't worry about us!" Gemstone said. "Have fun!"

They pushed the adults so hastily that Button fell into Sweetie Belle's lap. Blushing, he quickly sat up.

"Girls," Sweetie Belle said, "if this has anything to do with what I said earlier…"

She and Button Mash shrieked as Raspberry slapped the end of the boat, casting it off.

"Get crazy, you adorable lovebirds!" Raspberry hollered.

"Ahem," the ride attendant, an earth mare said with a cough. "Are you two fillies riding together?"

"Oh," Gemstone said with a blush. "Well, um…I suppose since we came all this way…"

"It'll just be two filly friends riding a swan boat through a lovey-dovey tunnel," Raspberry said, throwing her hoof around her friend's neck. "Nothing weird about that!"

She pulled the unicorn into the next boat.

"Besides," Raspberry said in a whisper, "this way, we'll be able to check progress on Operation: ButtonBelle."

"But how?" Gemstone said as the boat moved forward. "They're way up ahead of us."

"Hang on," Raspberry said, reaching into her mane. "Oh, shoot! The binoculars are in *Cherry's* mane! Oh, wait a minute." She pulled out a cardboard tube. "Guess this'll have to do."

She looked through the tube at the boat up ahead.

"What's happening?" Gemstone asked.

"Don't know," Raspberry said. "They're just sitting and saying nothing. Wait. I think Button Mash is about to say something!"

The unicorn leaned towards her. "What? What?"

"Again, don't know. Blueberry's the one who can read lips." Raspberry lowered her tube with a sigh. "I miss my sisters."

Meanwhile, in the boat up ahead, Button and Sweetie Belle were shifting uncomfortably in their seats. Sweetie Belle rubbed her foreleg awkwardly while Button looked up at the giant heart decorations.

"You know," he said, "this ride isn't too bad. Kinda reminds me of

Sugar Cube Corner." He looked over to Sweetie Belle. "Remember our old milkshake races?"

"Yeah," Sweetie Belle said with a snort. "You always got a brain freeze before you could finish."

He chuckled. "Yeah. I was quite the goof, wasn't I?"

"You're *still* a goof." She nudged him playfully.

"Hey!" he said, massaging his foreleg.

"Don't be offended. I always liked that about you."

He blinked. "Really?"

"Well…yeah."

They locked eyes for a moment.

"You know your niece and her friend are watching us through a toilet paper tube, right?" Button Mash said.

Sweetie Belle rolled her eyes. "Yup."

"Any idea what their deal is?"

She groaned. "I think they're trying to set us up."

"As in," he said with a gulp, "like a date?"

"Yup," she said with an annoyed expression on her face. "Like a date."

"Oh." He blushed. "This, uh…must feel pretty awkward, huh?"

"Oh yeah."

"Oh," he said, hanging his head sadly.

"Not in the way you think!" she said quickly.

His head perked up. "Oh?"

"Because," Sweetie Belle said, looking away with a blush, "I was… going to show how I felt about you another way."

"Oh?" He grinned brightly. "That's so weird! I was going to show how *I* felt about *you* another way too!"

She looked at him in surprise. "You were?"

"Yeah!" Reaching into his jacket pocket, he pulled out his notebook. "See, the girls got me thinking, when they were talking about how they'd like more female heroes in video games rather than have them be the damsel in distress and…what if instead of the princess being in trouble, she's the one battling monsters?"

Then he showed her a sketch of a unicorn mare with a curly mane. She was clad in armor and wearing a small tiara on her head.

"I wanted to ask you first, but," he said shyly, "I was thinking of calling this new character…Princess Sweetness."

Sweetie Belle's eyes widened.

"I…modeled her after you, Sweetie Belle, because…" He looked down at his hooves. "Even when we were foals, you…you've always been a princess in my eyes."

Sweetie Belle put her hoof to her heart, and her eyes never left his until the ride was over.

"Did it work?" Gemstone asked as their boat approached the end.

"I think so," Raspberry said. "They were smiling and staring into each other's eyes the whole ride! I think it's safe to say that Operation: ButtonBelle is a success!"

"Operation: ButtonBelle?"

The fillies looked up to see Sweetie Belle glaring down at them with her hooves crossed. Button Mash stood beside her, his face stoic.

"So I was right," Sweetie Belle said. "You *were* trying to set us up."

"Um," Gemstone said, smiling nervously. "Maybe?"

"But it's only because you two looked so cute together," Raspberry said, hopping out of the boat before helping Gemstone.

Sweetie Belle shook her head. "Don't you know better than to meddle in other ponies' love lives?" She sighed. "I suppose this is karma for that time we tried setting up Big Mac and Cheerilee."

"But Big Mac and Cheerilee got together," Gemstone said. "And they're happy."

"Yes, but they got there on their *own* and didn't need me and my friends interfering. I know your hearts were in the right place, but… that was really embarrassing!" She groaned. "Well, at least you didn't try a love potion."

Gemstone hung her head. "We're sorry, Aunt Sweetie Belle."

"I'm not!" Raspberry piped.

After sending her a glare, Gemstone continued to say, "It's just…you were complaining about how dull your love life is and…you seemed to like Button Mash so much that…"

"And I *do* like Button Mash," Sweetie Belle said.

"And I like Sweetie Belle," Button said. "I always have."

"And, if you hadn't meddled, we would've confessed our feelings in our own time."

Gemstone blinked. "Really?"

Button showed them the drawing. "I created a new video game character in Sweetie Belle's image."

"Ooh," Raspberry said, taking the notebook. "A princess fighting monsters! Now *that's* more like it!"

"And what about you, Aunt Sweetie Belle?" Gemstone asked.

"Yeah," Button said, turning to Sweetie Belle. "You still haven't told me what *you* had planned."

Sweetie Belle smirked. "You'll see. Which reminds me. We better get your friends so we can get ready for the show tonight."

She turned around and headed for the ride's exit.

"Wait, wait," Raspberry said, chasing after her. "So are you two together or not?"

"Yeah!" Button shouted. "I'd kinda like that answer too!"

"I said you'll see!" Sweetie Belle called over her shoulder.

"Aw, come on! You can't just leave me hanging like that!"

"Yeah, Sweetie!" Raspberry said, hopping to her side. "You can't just leave him hanging like that! There's such a thing as too much romantic tension! What about…?"

She was cut off by Gemstone's hoof covering her mouth.

"Why don't we just let nature run its course, Razz?" Gemstone said, winking at her aunt.

"Trust me." Sweetie Belle returned her wink. "It'll be worth it."

Prism jumped in her seat as a ghost in a sheet popped out from behind a suitcase. Kicks smirked at her.

"What's the matter? Scared, Penguin?"

She scowled. "I wasn't scared! I was just surprised!"

"Ya know," Kicks said, scooting closer to her, "if you're scared, you could always hold my hoof if it'd make you feel better."

"I'm not scared!"

"This whole ride is lame anyway. I mean look at this stuff! It's totally

fake and…"

Suddenly, a tall figure jumped out from a pile of suitcases and whinnied at them. It was the silhouette of a headless horse draped in a cape.

Kicks screamed, throwing his hooves around Prism. "IT'S A HEADLESS HORSE! THEY *DO* EXIST!"

Prism rolled her eyes. "Relax, it's just a…"

"GET ME OFF THIS RIDE!" he shouted, kicking his legs against the safety bar. "GET ME OFF THIS RIDE! THE GHOSTS ARE REAL!"

The figure ducked back behind the suitcases. The cape slid off to show Cherry sitting on H.G.'s shoulders, for she had been holding up the neck of the cape. Blueberry was on the stallion's back, holding the megaphone she had used to make the spooky whinny sounds. The three of them snickered.

"I will admit," H.G. said, "that will *definitely* keep the legend of the Headless Ghost alive."

"And ponies will remember him as frightening too!" Blueberry said.

"Not to mention it was funny!" Cherry said with a snort. "Did you *see* how scared Kicks was when he screamed and held onto Prism for dear life?!"

Blueberry's laughter died down. "Wait. Did you say Kicks and *Prism* ?"

Cherry grew silent and looked down the way the buggies were going.

"As fun as that was," H.G. said as he bent down to let the fillies off, "I believe we had a deal."

He led them back down the trapdoor and into the old control room. He opened another door to reveal a staircase going up. Sunlight shone from up above.

"Thanks, H.G.," Blueberry said as she trotted up the stairs.

"It sure was nice meeting you," Cherry said, following her.

"Next time you have the urge to solve a mystery, girls," H.G. said, "try not to wander off."

"We'll keep that in mind," Blueberry said.

When the fillies reached the top of the stairs, H.G. called, "Oh, and girls…"

They turned back to H.G., who smiled as his head rolled off his shoulder and into his hoof. The two triplets' eyes widened in horror.

"Come back soooooon," the head said in a low, eerie voice.

The door slammed shut. Blueberry and Cherry looked at each other in disbelief.

"Was that…?" Cherry said.

"It couldn't…"

"How…?"

Blueberry glanced back down at closed door. "Maybe…this is one mystery that *should* be left alone." She looked at her sister. "And should be kept to ourselves."

"Agreed," Cherry said with a quick nod.

As they returned to the bench outside Nightmare Moon Mountain, Kicks and Prism laughed about their experience.

"Those mummies were *so* fake!" Prism exclaimed.

"You could even see the wires!" Kicks said.

"But they were still more convincing than your headless horse," she said, elbowing him in the side.

"Hey!" He jumped back in protest. "I told you, I was just playing it up so you wouldn't feel bad about being scared!"

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, right. You were *totally* wimping out."

"Was not!"

The pout on his face made her laugh even harder. After a minute, Kicks started chuckling along with her as they sat down on the bench.

"Why don't we ever do stuff like this more often?" Prism asked.

Kicks shrugged. "Because it'd ruin our reputation as sworn enemies?"

"Yeah." She paused. "Why do we have to be sworn enemies again?"

He opened his mouth but then stopped himself. "You know what? I'm not even sure."

The two of them sat in silence for a long while.

"Look, Kicks," Prism said, turning to him. "Let's face it. We haven't really been enemies for quite some time now, not since…" She blushed. "Well, you know. And frankly…I'm tired of us fighting."

"Me too," Kicks said, crossing his back legs. "So, uh…" He looked at her hopefully. "Does that mean we can be…?"

"Stop." She held up her hoof. "I know what you're gonna say, and the answer's still no."

He frowned. "But…we've been having such a great time together. We even connected with our mutual loneliness."

"Yeah, I know, but…" She shifted uncomfortably on the bench. "I just…don't think we're in a place to be…anything more than friends. I mean…you *like it* when I *punch* you."

He shrugged. "Might have to do with being raised by two pro

kickboxers. But…yeah, I see your point."

"All I'm saying is that I think it's time we stop being enemies and…at least *try* to be friends?"

She held out her hoof and he stared at it for a long while.

"And," he said unsurely, "maybe…in the future we could…?"

She narrowed her gaze. "One step at a time there, Romeo."

Grinning, he took her hoof. "Deal."

"Prism?"

The two foals turned upon hearing Gemstone's voice. She, the Tri-Pies and Sweetie Belle were standing in front of them, staring.

"What…what are you doing with *him* ?" Gemstone asked, glancing suspiciously at the colt.

"Oh," Prism said, dropping her hoof from his. "Kicks and I met in line and we've been, um…"

"Talking," he finished for her.

"Yeah, talking."

"Uh-huh," Blueberry said, crossing her hooves. "Is that *all* you've been doing?"

She and Blueberry looked even *more* suspiciously at Kicks.

"S-Sort of," Prism said. "Actually, we just called a ceasefire."

"Yeah, no more picking on you girls," Kicks said.

"Really?" Raspberry said.

"What's the catch?" Cherry asked.

"No catch," Prism said. "We've just…grown up, is all."

"That's good to hear," Sweetie Belle said. "Prism, are you bringing your friend to the concert?"

"Kicks!" a female voice called.

"That's my sister," Kicks said, turning to Prism. "I'll catch you at the concert later."

"'Kay," Prism said, waving as he hopped off the bench. "Later!"

When she looked back at her friends, they were scowling, especially Gemstone.

"What?"

"Let's go, girls," Sweetie Belle said, helping Prism down from the bench. "We better get to the soundstage, or else Snips and Snails are gonna have my neck."

As the fillies walked behind Sweetie Belle, Prism saw that Gemstone was still glaring at her.

"It's not what you think, Gem," Prism whispered. "Kicks is not as bad as he seems."

"Is that so?" Gemstone said gruffly. "Well then, what *were* you doing before we got here?"

Glancing at their chaperone, Prism replied, "I'll tell you when we're alone."

The whole amphitheater cheered as the CMC band came out onstage. The current generation of Crusaders jumped up and down in the front row. Kicks stood beside Prism.

"Good evening, Whinny Land!" Scootaloo said into her mic.

"Y'all ready to rock?" Apple Bloom said, getting her guitar ready.

The crowd cheered.

"We're gonna start off the show with a brand new single," Sweetie Belle said. "And I mean *new.* " She looked shyly down at her hooves. "I…came up with it today while running into an old friend."

She locked eyes with Button Mash, who stood in the row behind the fillies.

Turning to her bandmates, Sweetie Belle shouted, "One, two, three, four!"

Apple Bloom strummed hard on her guitar while Scootaloo's hooves flew across her keytar. After a few measures, Sweetie Belle began to sing in an upbeat voice:

" *Fancy seeing you after all this time.*

It's been what, like, ten or twenty years?

I really missed you and what do you know?

When you said the same, it was music to my ears.

Must admit I have been thinking 'bout you quite a lot

Not a day goes by when I don't wonder what you're up to.

I have lived my dreams and become a whopping success.

And hey, how 'bout it? It turned out that way for you too.

Remember when we'd play them video games

You lost a life saving me from a zombie.

Now you're all grown up and I really must say

You're still as cute as a button to me."

She winked at Button Mash, who wore a bright grin as he put his hoof to his chest. Gemstone and Raspberry noticed this and giggled.

"I suppose they didn't need our help after all," Gemstone said.

"Guess there are just some things that are better left alone," Raspberry said. "True love, perfect cupcake recipes…"

"And urban legends," Blueberry said.

"Woo hoo!" Cherry cried, pushing between Raspberry and Gemstone. "Go, CMC!"

As she wailed, she grabbed Gemstone's hoof and shot it into the air. Laughing, Gemstone grabbed the hoof beside her, Prism's, and did the same. Then Prism grabbed Kicks' hoof, forming a cheering chain.

Raspberry's cheering stopped when she noticed something strange about the four foals holding each other's' hooves while jumping up and down.

"Hey, Blue," Raspberry whispered, elbowing her sister. "Do you see what I see?"

Blueberry looked to where she was pointing and squinted.

Cherry was casting a sideways glance at Gemstone while Kicks had his full attention on Prism. He wasn't the only one, for Gemstone's eyes were flitting from the stage to the pegasus whose hoof she was holding. Prism, meanwhile, didn't notice either gazes, as she was too focused on the performance in front of them.

"Yeah," Blueberry said with a slow nod.

Raspberry looked to her. "What do you think it means?"

Blueberry blinked. "I'm…not sure."

Blueberry then remembered one of Cherry's confessions back in the Haunted Stable. At the same time, Raspberry recalled Kicks' confession about Prism a few months back, as well as what Gemstone had revealed to her in the arcade.

"Maybe," Raspberry said slowly, "this is *another* thing that should be left alone. For now."

Wow. The length of the hiatus I took for this story is really surprising. This is actually a chapter I've had in the works since at least five chapters back, but I never knew when to put it. Originally, it was just going to be a cute carnival chapter with some ButtonBelle. Then the comic *My Little Pony: Friends Forever #8* came out and I changed the setting to Whinny Land which is the MLP version of Disneyland. But I was still having trouble with the chapter and felt it was a little bland. It actually took advice from a BronyCon panel on writing theme to get me out of this writer's block: "Write your story, and figure out the theme later." That's when I realized that the scenarios I had set up in this chapter had a them to it: some things are better left alone.

Since I finally went on the ride for the first time a couple years back, the Haunted Mansion became my favorite Disneyland ride. The Headless Ghost was based on an actual lost attraction of the ride, the Hatbox Ghost. The animatronic had only been on the ride for opening week and kept malfunctioning, then one day it disappeared with no record of what happened to it, yet park-goers claimed to have seen the ghost on the ride. Recently, Disneyland recreated the Hatbox Ghost and now he's on the ride again (hopefully for good). The bit with Blueberry and Cherry meeting H.G. was also inspired by an episode of "Doug."

I know this little series has been going on for a while...but we're actually coming to its close pretty soon. You'll see.

Gift of the Raspberry Lemon

Just in time for the holidays!

"And…done!" Raspberry said, signing a Hearth's Warming card. "Envelope me!"

Lemon Drop levitated a red envelope over to her and used his magic to slide the card inside. Raspberry licked the flap before he sealed it.

"To Rainbow Dash and Soarin," Lemon Drop murmured as he wrote down the address on the envelope, peering at an open book in front of him.

"You think the card will make it past enemy lines to Afghanisteed?" Raspberry asked him.

"We'll have to pay a slightly expensive postage fee," Lemon Drop said, selecting a stamp with a wreath on it, "but it should make it to your aunt and uncle."

The two young sweethearts were in Lemon Drop's bedroom. The filly lay on her belly on the floor, surrounded by construction paper, glitter and markers, while the colt sat on his bed with a stack of red envelopes, an address book, a book of stamps, and a long sheet of paper.

"Thanks for helping me with my Hearth's Warming cards, Lemony," Raspberry said. "There are so many ponies in town, and so many ponies I know currently out of town, that it takes forever to make a card for each and every one of them."

"It's no problem, Razz," he said, licking the stamp and sticking it to the envelope. "I've got a whole lot of holiday stamps to spare. And I think it's real sweet of you to make a card for every single pony in Ponyville."

"Yeah, well," she said, smiling bashfully, "I just like to spread that holiday cheer. So who's next on our list?"

Lemon Drop magically lifted the long sheet of paper up to his eyes. "Princess Twilight Sparkle and Flash Sentry." He lowered the paper. "Uh…how come you didn't write ' *Prince* Flash Sentry?' I mean he's a prince now, right? Since he married a princess?"

"Eh," Raspberry said with a shrug, folding a red piece of paper in half. "That guy's gotta do more than get married to be a prince in my book." She tapped her green glitter pen against her temple. "Let's see. Those two'll be having that baby soon, so…aha!"

She started writing inside the card:

" *As the year rolls out, and another rolls in,*

Blessings to the new life within.

May your baby be warm in your belly,

And hope her diapers won't be smelly.

Happy Hearth's Warming to your soon-to-be-born babe! "

Lemon Drop chuckled. "How do you come up with this stuff?"

"Just comes to me," Raspberry said, signing her name. "So, any holiday plans?"

"My moms and I are going to Manehattan. Even though we don't live there anymore, we'd still like to keep our holiday traditions: ice skating, attending the Manehattan Tree Lighting ceremony, and then there's the big New Year's bash that we never miss!"

"Sounds like fun, even if you won't be around for the holidays." After using construction paper to make an image of a baby in a gift box, she said, "Envelope me!"

As Lemon Drop took the envelope from the top of the stack, the stack suddenly tipped over, the envelopes scattering all over the floor.

"Oops," he said.

"Let me help," Raspberry said, reaching for an envelope.

"That's okay, I've got it."

Raspberry watched in awe as Lemon Drop used his magic to swiftly levitate the envelopes off the floor and form them into a tower, all within a matter of seconds.

"Wow," she whispered as Lemon Drop placed her card in an envelope. Licking the flap, she said, "You're almost as organized as Auntie Twilight. I mean just look at your room!"

She gestured to the bed, its covers tucked tightly under the mattress. Then she glanced at the bookshelf, in which the books were organized by size—the tall books on the top and the small ones on the bottom—and alphabetized.

"Even Swiss and Gouda's cage is spick and span!" Raspberry said, pointing to the white mice. "It's like they don't poop at all!"

"Oh," Lemon Drop said with a blush. "It's no big deal." He searched the address book for Princess Twilight. "I just…like to keep things neat and tidy."

"Yeah," Raspberry said, standing up and walking over to his dresser. On it were framed photographs, lined neatly in three rows, organized from shortest to tallest from front to back. "But I like that about you. I mean you should see my room. Blueberry might be organized too, but with all three of us sharing it, it's always a total… mess."

She trailed off when a particular photograph caught her attention. In the background was a statue of a lady Raspberry recognized to be from Manehattan. A family of three unicorns stood leaning against the rail of a boat in front of it. In the middle was a small yellow colt with white hair and brown eyes who looked to be around five years old.

He was held by a mare and a stallion. The mare shared the colt's yellow coat, and had a curly blue mane and tail and red violet eyes.

Her cutie mark was three hearts circling each other, one green and two blue. The stallion's mane matched the colt's. He was brown with bright blue eyes and a cutie mark of four octagonal emeralds.

Raspberry easily recognized the colt as Lemon Drop, but she had never seen the stallion and mare before.

"Hey, Lemony?" Raspberry called, pointing to the photograph. "Who are these folks?"

Lemon Drop turned to her. The second he saw what she was indicating, his face grew solemn.

"Oh," he said, lowering his head. "Those are…my parents."

Surprised, Raspberry spun towards him. "Your parents?"

"My birth parents, anyway," he said, levitating a stamp from his book.

Raspberry glanced between the happy colt in the picture and the sad colt on the bed. "You know, in the hundred and thirteen days we've been dating, I don't think you've ever once mentioned your birth parents."

"Really?" Lemon Drop rubbed the back of his neck. "Sorry, I guess…I guess I just…"

He trailed off, unsure of how to continue. With a sympathetic smile, Raspberry sat down beside him on the bed.

"What were they like?" she asked.

After locking eyes with her a moment, he sighed. "Great. I didn't have them for very long, but they were great."

Using his magic, he levitated the photograph onto his lap. "My dad, Rare Find, was an antique dealer. He liked to collect really old stuff."

"Like you like to collect stamps!" Raspberry exclaimed, pointing at the stallion in the picture. "Plus he has your mane!"

That made him crack a smile. "Instead of telling me regular bedtime stories, he would bring one of his latest finds into my room and tell me the history behind it. One time, he brought in a diamond that had some sort of curse on it. Everyone who'd ever owned it had died in some horrible way." He chuckled. "Mom got mad at him for trying to scare me."

"And your mom?" Raspberry asked, scooting closer. "What was she like?"

"Her name was Lemon Hearts," he said, staring wistfully at the mare in the photo. "She was an event planner. Used to work in the Canterlot Palace before she and Dad moved to Manehattan. She planned all sorts of things: birthday parties, weddings, baby showers…"

"She organized things," Raspberry said. "Like you organize your room. Plus, your coats match!"

Lemon Drop giggled. "She was kind of like your mom, only less… hyper. She told me she went to school with Princess Twilight, but I never really got to meet her before…"

His smile suddenly turned upside-down. Matching his frown, Raspberry laid her hoof over his.

"If…you don't mind talking about it…what…happened to them?"

Hugging the picture close to his chest, he muttered, "They took a cab, and it was raining hard. I was six."

Raspberry lowered her head. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he said, setting the picture down. "I wasn't in the orphanage for very long. See, Mom and Mommy Lyra were friends at school, so she and Mommy Bon-Bon would visit our apartment often. After the accident, they started writing to me, saying that if I ever needed some pony to talk to, they were there."

Glancing around, as if to see if any pony was watching, Lemon Drop used his magic to pick up a shoebox from underneath his bed. Opening the lid, he revealed two stacks of letters, tightly woven

together with twine.

"Their letters made that long year in the orphanage feel less lonely," he said.

"Hold on, *year* ?" Raspberry asked with wide eyes. "You mean your moms, who had known you before you were orphaned, took a *whole year* to adopt you?!"

"The adoption process takes a while, but with all the letters they sent, they already felt like family." He sighed. "Three years ago, they were finally able to bring me home."

Raspberry stared at the box of letters. "Is…this why you like stamps so much?"

Lemon Drop nodded. "Whenever a letter came, I wanted to send a reply right away, so I started collecting stamps so I could send them. Letters bring ponies so far away from each other closer together."

"Gee," Raspberry said, looking down at her mess of construction paper. "S-Sorry if I reopened some old wounds or…"

"No, no, no. It's okay. To be honest, I should've told you this story long ago."

She bit her lip. "M-Maybe we should take a break."

He slid off the bed. "I'll go get us some snacks from the kitchen."

As he left the room, Raspberry stared down at the still open box of letters. She was almost tempted to read them, but thought better of it. After all, Lemon Drop might notice if she disturbed his filing system.

She couldn't help but notice how old and worn the shoebox was.

Despite the depressing revelation, Lemon Drop and Raspberry had managed to finish all the Heart's Warming cards before noon. The two of them had put on their boots, hats and scarves and were

walking through the snowy street.

"Sure you're able to carry all that?" Raspberry asked, staring up at the hovering stack of addressed envelopes. "I know young unicorns sometimes have trouble carrying really heavy stuff."

Lemon Drop shook his head. "When it comes to letters and stamps, I could carry a ton of them."

"Yeah," Raspberry said, cocking her head to the side. "You're… pretty nifty with mailing stuff, aren't you?"

He shrugged. "Not as good as Miss Derpy is, I'm sure."

The moment Raspberry opened the door to the post office, both their jaws dropped. There was a mob of ponies at the counter, yelling at the clerk.

"I need these delivered in time for Hearth's Warming!"

"This box of cookies you delivered is crushed!"

"You delivered my card to the wrong address, it got returned!"

"One at a time, one at a time!" Derpy exclaimed, holding up her hooves. "Every pony calm down, please!"

Raspberry and Lemon Drop turned to each other.

"Miss Derpy looks like she's in trouble," the latter said.

The former groaned. "We'll *never* get these cards delivered!"

With a look of determination, Lemon Drop approached the mob.

"Lemony?" Raspberry called. "What are you doing?"

To every pony's surprise, Lemon Drop used his magic to push the ponies aside and clear a path for himself. He dropped the stack of envelopes onto the desk. Derpy gazed up at them open-mouthed.

"Look, kid," Derpy said, trying to sound as kind as possible. "I'll get your letters delivered, but you'll have to wait in line like every pony

else."

Lemon Drop stood on his hind legs and placed his front hooves on the desk. "Need any help?"

Without hesitance, Derpy released a sigh of relief. " *YES* ! Hearth's Warming is the most difficult time of year for me! Gifts go here, cards go there, *gift cards* go all around the world!"

The young colt squinted at the shelves behind her, which were overflowing with boxes and papers. "Well here's your problem. You've got so must stuff and so little space."

"Well, what do you expect?" Derpy said, gesturing to her surroundings. "This building is smaller than a Breezie's cottage!"

"It's not so much the size that's the problem. You just need a little organization." He smiled. "Lucky for you, organizing's one of the things I do best!"

"Hey!" a stallion cried, slamming his wrapped packages on the desk. "Can I get some service here?!"

Derpy looked desperately at Lemon Drop. "I'll take your word for it, kid. But first we've gotta deal with this mob."

A sharp whistle caused the disgruntled customers to turn towards the door.

"Cookies, any pony?" Raspberry asked, holding out a plate of gingerbread.

The ponies murmured amongst each other before rushing to grab a cookie.

"Where did she…?" Derpy started to ask in confusion.

Lemon Drop held up a hoof. "I've learned not to question her. Now," he said, glancing around, "let's start with that mess of a cardboard pile in the back corner."

Lemon Drop spent the next hour organizing the post office with Derpy while Raspberry kept the customers at bay with her gingerbread (of which she miraculously never ran out). Lemon Drop started with the pile of empty, flattened cardboard boxes. He organized them by size, placed them in individual stacks, tied each stack together with twine and then leaned them against the wall, smallest in front and tallest in back. He kept one particularly tall box, used his magic to set it up, and then placed the once scattered tubes of wrapping paper inside.

With the lobby cleared up, the customers had more space to walk about. Those who had been calmed down by the gingerbread formed a straight line to Derpy's desk. Beads of sweat started dripping down Derpy's forehead, until she noticed Lemon Drop using his magic to straighten out the shelves behind her. Letters that were piling up in cubbies were flattened together so that they could fit better into the tiny spaces. Smiling, Derpy was ready to meet with the customers again.

In no time at all, the last customer was served and the post office was no longer in chaos, in terms of noise and appearance. Lemon Drop was even sweeping the floor.

"Wow, kid," Derpy said, coming up to him. "This place hasn't looked more…more…"

"Organized?" he offered.

"Yes! And I like what you did with my office supplies drawer! I can find my stapler and rubber bands again!" She looked at him thoughtfully. "Think you can do me one last favor?"

He shrugged. "Sure."

"Everything may be in its place thanks to you, but I've still got a ton of stuff to deliver. I can fly to the other parts of Equestria, but do you think you can help me with the deliveries here in Ponyville? I'll pay you fifty bits."

His eyes widened. "Fifty?!"

"And a muffin basket." She nudged his shoulder playfully. "You can come and help out here any time you want."

Taking off his hat, he said, "I'd be honored!"

"Okay." She handed him a shoulder bag filled with letters. "Take these to…"

"Carousel Boutique," Lemon Drop said, peering into the bag, "Sugar Cube Corner, Sweet Apple Acres…"

She listened in wonder as he listed off every single address, not even glancing twice inside the bag.

"I…guess you've got this," she said, walking back to her desk. "Just try not to drop them!"

"I won't!" Lemon Drop called. Then he remembered his girlfriend who'd been waiting. "Oh, Razz! I, uh, hope you don't mind, but…"

He trailed off when he saw her shocked state. She stood by the door, her cheeks puffed and a headless gingerbread pony in her hoof. She stared at him with wide eyes.

"What's wrong?" he asked in concern.

Slowly, her free hoof rose, pointing to his flank. Lemon Drop glanced behind him and gasped.

On his flank was an image of a postage stamp, a lemon inside the square.

"My…my…" he uttered in disbelief.

He was cut off as Raspberry suddenly threw her hooves around his neck. "I *knew* it! I knew it! With all your talk of stamps and letters and how your tragic loss made it all important to you and how you were so happy organizing this place I just knew you'd get a cutie mark in postal stuff, oh Lemony I'm so proud and so happy that you got your cutie mark and only after a few short months since you joined our…"

Frowning suddenly, she pulled away. "Hey! We've all been trying to

get our cutie marks for over a year, but you got yours after only a few months in our club?!"

Lemon Drop chuckled awkwardly. "Still mad at me?"

She took a moment to think about it, and then grinned. "At you? Never!"

She hugged him again, which made him smile.

Their moment was interrupted by an "AWWWWWW!" from the front desk. The two foals looked over at Derpy, who was staring at them dreamily, and blushed.

"You two are so adorable!" she said, putting her hoof to her heart. "Though seriously, I need those letters delivered before five."

"Right," Lemon Drop said, opening the door. "You coming, Razz?"

"Go ahead," she said. "I'll catch up."

Nodding, Lemon Drop went outside. Raspberry looked back at Derpy.

"Hey, you got any shoeboxes here?"

"Hmm," Derpy said, scratching her head. "Oh, yes! In the back!" She laughed. "Boy, I'm *really* glad that kid decided to help! I know where everything is now!"

On Hearth's Warming morning in Manehattan, Lemon Drop sat with his moms around a tiny artificial tree they had bought for their hotel room, scraps of wrapping paper and boxes surrounding them.

"How do you like your gifts, sweetie?" Bon-Bon asked.

"I love 'em!" Lemon Drop said, holding an empty album to his chest. "And I love the new Hearth's Warming stamps you got me!" He levitated one into view. "Do you know how rare this Commander Hurricane one is?"

"Of course we do!" Lyra exclaimed. "That's why we got it."

He pulled them both into a grateful hug. "You're the best moms ever!"

"Now hold on, squirt," Lyra said, levitating another wrapped gift into view. "There's one more present for you. From your little girlfriend."

He sat up. "Raspberry?"

"She handed it to us before we left," Bon-Bon said, "insisted that we give it to you today."

Lemon Drop looked at the gift curiously as it landed in his lap. It was wrapped in bright pink paper with pictures of raspberries all over it. He used his magic to open it very slowly. His mothers only smiled, knowing that he wanted to save the wrapping.

When the gift was finally unwrapped, Lemon Drop gasped. It was a shoebox painted magenta, the same color as Raspberry's mane. The edges were outlined with silver glitter glue, studded with blue plastic gemstones. In the center of the lid was a painted image of Lemon Drop with his moms on either side of him. Lyra and Bon-Bon put their hooves to their hearts.

Opening the shoebox, Lemon Drop found a pink card with a crayon drawing of him and Raspberry inside a heart. It was less sophisticated than the family picture on the box, but it still made him smile. He read the inside of the card aloud for his moms to hear.

" *I saw that the shoebox to hold the letters from your moms was old and worn and, frankly, boring-looking. So I made you a new one. Prism painted the picture of you and your moms, since she's so much better at drawing ponies than I am, but I drew the picture of us. I also borrowed the fake sapphires from Gemstone. They really wanted to help because we love you. But I love you most.*

Thanks for opening up to me. I know your birth mom and dad would be very proud of your cutie mark.

With all the love and Hearth's Warming wishes in the world,

Raspberry Strudel Pie. "

When he looked up at his moms, he saw that they had tears in their eyes. No words needed to be said as they embraced each other once more.

Lemon Drop cried silently along with them, thinking how lucky he was to have these two mares in his life. And that very special filly.

Two weeks later, after all the Hearth's Warming and New Year's festivities, there was a knock at the Party Palace door. Raspberry answered it to find Lemon Drop standing there in his hat, boots and scarf.

"Lemony!" Raspberry exclaimed, hugging him. "You're back!"

"I got your gift," he said.

"And I got yours," she said. Reaching into her mane, she pulled out a stamp with a raspberry on it. "It's so sweet! Simple, but sweet!"

"Not as sweet as yours," Lemon Drop said. Blushing, he shifted his hooves back and forth. "I…know it's a little late, but…I've got another little gift for you."

She looked at him curiously. "What for?"

"Not only did you give me that shoebox, but…you gave me my cutie mark."

She waved her hoof. "You got that cutie mark on your own."

"Maybe, but…if you hadn't taken me on that Hearth's Warming cards expedition, I might not've realized my calling. And you put a lot of thought into that shoebox, Razz, I can't really compete with it! I can't think of anything better I could possibly give you, except…"

His eyes drifted upwards. Following his gaze, Raspberry discovered a clump of mistletoe hanging above the door.

"I don't remember putting that up…"

Without warning, Lemon Drop shot forward and gave her a quick peck on the lips, causing her to go stiff. She stared at him in awe and disbelief.

That had been their very first kiss.

Grinning, Lemon Drop said, "Happy Hearth's Warming, Razz."

I told you this fanfic would be wrapping up soon. And now you see why. *sniff* It's time for these foals to grow up.

Now to explain the choices for Lemon Drop's parents. I'd based Lemon Drop's appearance off of the first stallion to be drained by Tirek in "Twilight's Kingdom" (I just loved the white mane!). Turns out his name is Rare Find. I'd also thought of Lemon Hearts, mainly for her name and coat. The fact that she ended up being a childhood friend of Lyra made it even more convenient!

I think my choice for Lemon Drop's cutie mark is blatantly obvious.

Now, I'm going to be taking a break from fanfiction, not just because of "Daughter of Discord," but I'm trying to get a play finished in time for a contest deadline (which is in February). Hopefully though, the next chapter of this fic will be around Valentine's Day. If not, the next chapter will at least be ABOUT Valentine's Day.

Stories

And now, a Valentine's Day story I've been planning for a long time.

" *So if you're in Anugypt,*

And you see a crocodile,

Give him whatever you want,

Just don't give him a smile. "

The class laughed and applauded, making Raspberry grin as she lowered the piece of paper in her hoof.

"Well done as always, Raspberry," Cheerilee said, patting her on the back. "Very creative and humorous."

"Aw, it was nothing," Raspberry said with a blush. "I just wanted to find out how many words I could rhyme with 'crocodile.'"

"Well, you wrote it out beautifully. A+, as usual. You may sit back down."

Raspberry skipped back to her seat. As she sat down, Lemon Drop whispered to her.

"You write such good poems. Mine was lousy."

"No, it wasn't," Raspberry said, nudging his shoulder playfully. "You just need to make the lines less clunky, and not focus so much on the rhyme. In fact, not all poems have to even rhyme."

Lemon Drop bit his lip as he stared down at his poem. "Work on it with me after school?"

Before Raspberry could answer, Mrs. Cheerilee spoke. "Excellent

work on your poetry assignments, my little ponies! Now, since this Wednesday is Hearts and Hooves Day, I thought we'd make our next writing assignment something special. Since Hearts and Hooves Day has to do with love, I want you all to write a one-to-two-page report on how your parents met!"

The foals murmured amongst each other. Lemon Drop raised his hoof.

"Yes, Lemon Drop?" Mrs. Cheerilee said.

"Should I write about my birth parents or my adoptive parents?" he asked.

"Whichever you choose, sweetie. You can even write about both, if you'd like." Raspberry raised her hoof. "Yes, Raspberry?"

"Um," Raspberry said, biting her lip, "does this mean," she pointed to her sister, "Blueberry, Cherry and I *all* have to write the same story?"

"Yes, Raspberry." The teacher gave her a small smile. "But I still expect your reports to be unique. After all, some of the greatest stories we hear have been told multiple times, but are different each time, because every pony has their own unique way of telling it."

The bell rang and foals leaped excitedly out of their desks.

"Remember, children," Mrs. Cheerilee shouted over the noise. "Your reports are due Hearts and Hooves Day and will be read during our party! Oh, and don't forget to bring your gifts for your classmates!"

As the Cutie Mark Crusaders—including Lemon Drop, for he was still an honorary member even though he had received his cutie mark—filed out of the schoolhouse, they chatted excitedly about their reports.

"The story of how my mom and dad met is awesome!" Prism exclaimed. "First, Mom saved Dad and the rest of the Wonderbolts at the Best Young Flyers' Competition with her sonic rainboom! But Dad didn't *really* start noticing her until the Grand Galloping Gala, when she saved his pie from being smushed!" She snickered. "The

funniest part is Mom *hates* pie!"

"I know my parents didn't fall in love immediately," Gemstone said. "Daddy was with another pony when he and Mum bumped into each other. No, they *really* bumped into each other!" She sighed. "I just despise writing assignments."

"At least Mrs. Cheerilee gave you the option of doing an oral report instead of a written one," Prism said.

"Mommy Lyra and Mommy Bon-Bon met at a party when they were fillies and then found each other again years later," Lemon Drop said, "but I'll have to ask them if they know how my birth parents met."

"The story of our mommy and daddy meeting is just the cutest!" Cherry exclaimed.

"They actually met *twice* !" Blueberry said. "The first when Daddy was Cheese Sandwich, the second, as Red Shoes. Three times, if you count when Dad first saw her when they were foals."

"Either way, they instantly knew they were meant for each other!" Cherry said, throwing her hoof around Gemstone and squeezing her tight. "It was love at first laugh!"

"Well, we can't wait to hear about it," Gemstone said, gently coming out of Cherry's hold.

"Especially since we'll be hearing it three times," Prism said.

Raspberry stopped in her tracks. Lemon Drop looked back and saw her distressed expression.

"You girls go ahead," Lemon Drop said, walking back to his girlfriend. "We'll catch up."

As he stood at her side, he waited until the others were out of earshot.

"You okay?" he asked.

Raspberry nodded slowly. "I'm just…worried about the report."

"Why? You're the best writer in the whole class! Since when are you worried about a writing assignment?"

She sighed. "Since my sisters and I will be writing the exact same report."

"Not really," Lemon Drop said, putting his hoof on her shoulder. "Like I said, you're the best writer in the class. Whatever you write will be great."

His compliment made her smile, but it didn't rid her of her worry.

"Can I still come by later?" he asked. "So you can help me with my report?"

She nodded. "Sure."

Though Raspberry was certain this time *she* was the one who needed the help.

When the Tri-Pies got to the Party Palace and told their parents about their assignment, they heard the story of their parents' meeting for the hundred-and-twelfth time.

"And we've been together ever since!" Pinkie and Cheese finished together, wrapping their hooves around each other.

"It just keeps getting better and better every time I hear it!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"And it's so darn cute!" Cherry squeaked.

"Yeah," Raspberry mumbled with her head down. "So romantic."

Every pony turned to the seemingly depressed filly in concern.

"What's wrong, sis?" Blueberry asked.

"Yeah, you're *never* glum after hearing a love story," Cherry said.

"Yeah, well," Raspberry said, standing up, "you can only hear the same story so many times."

They all watched her as she trudged up the stairs.

"What's her problem?" Cherry asked.

"We should go cheer her up," Blueberry said.

"No, no!" Cheese said, holding up his hoof. "This clearly warrants a parent talk."

"Right," Pinkie said, shoving her husband to the side. "Go talk to her, Honey Pie."

"What?" Cheese said. "Why me?"

Putting her hooves on her hips, she replied, "Because it's *your* turn to have a heart-to-heart-parent-to-child talk."

"Me? But I did that last time!"

She shook her head. "No. *I* did it last time!"

"No, it was me! I talked to Blueberry and Cherry when they wouldn't accept the fact that their sister had a boyfriend!"

"Yes, but that was *before* the crazy election where I talked to them about putting their differences aside and just leaving well enough alone!"

"Yeah, and when that didn't work, I talked to them about the same thing!"

"He really did," Blueberry said.

"I was still the one who talked to them last," Pinkie said. "And as an egalitarian couple, we should share the burden of parenthood."

"What about that talk we had with Cherry about her crush?" Cheese asked.

"Dad, we agreed never to bring that up!" Cherry whispered, glancing

anxiously at Blueberry.

"If you mean that crush on Gemstone," Blueberry said, "I already know about that."

Cherry turned to her in alarm, blushing fiercely. "What?!"

"You let it slip at Whinny Land, remember?"

"That was *both of us* !" Pinkie insisted. "That doesn't count!"

"What about when we talked to the triplets about spending time with their cousins?" Cheese asked.

"Still both of us. And I was the one who talked to them about the birds and the bees."

"You did?!" Cheese exclaimed, stiffening. "That wasn't in this fanfic!"

"Oh, she did, alright," Blueberry said, crossing her forelegs. "And we know exactly how Mom managed to become pregnant with us *before* you got married."

Color rose to the stallion's cheeks as he glared at his wife. "We'll talk about this later."

"First," Pinkie said, pushing him towards the stairs, " *you* need to have a talk with our daughter."

Sighing in defeat, he started going up the stairs. "Okay, but next time it's *your* turn to talk. And not about the birds and the bees!"

Cherry shivered. "I'm still scarred for life."

Pinkie chuckled nervously. "Maybe I *should've* waited a few more years."

Cheese was still shaking his head as he came to the triplets' bedroom. The door was wide open when he found Raspberry lying face-down on her bed, groaning in misery.

"According to your mother," Cheese said, sitting down beside her,

"it's *my* turn for the heart-to-heart-parent-to-child talk, so…what's up?"

Grumbling, Raspberry turned her head towards her father. "It's this stupid writing assignment."

His eyebrows shot up. "Since when do you use the word 'stupid' and 'writing assignment' in the same sentence?"

She smothered her face into her pillow again, saying in a muffled voice, "Since my sisters and I are going to be writing the exact same report."

"Oh," Cheese Sandwich said in understanding. "I see. You think because you're going to be writing the same story, your reports are going to be exactly the same."

"But they are," Raspberry said, sitting up. "I mean…Blueberry, Cherry and I are exactly the same. We've always been. So of course our reports are going to be the same."

Cheese burst out laughing, making her turn to him in confusion.

"What's so funny?"

"Sorry!" Cheese chuckled, wiping away a tear. "It's just…you really think you and your sisters are exactly the same?"

She cocked her head. "Yeah. Since birth. You should know that, Dad."

He shook his head. "As your father, I know better than any pony, except your mother of course, that even though you three are triplets, you couldn't be any more different. And I'm not just talking about your colors. Even if you were identical, I'd still be able to tell the difference between you three."

"What do you mean?"

He wrapped a hoof around his daughter. "Ever since you were born, you and your sisters were in perfect sync. You'd cry together, you'd eat together, you'd poop together." He cringed. " *Not* my favorite part

of fatherhood." Then he smiled. "But there were times where you'd deviate from each other. Playtime especially.

"When we put you in your little playroom, Blueberry always went straight for the board books, Cherry would try climbing the furniture and you would start digging in the crayon box and draw crazily on the walls. Even now when you're older, no matter how inseparable you are, you all have different interests.

"I've seen you girls go to the library and bring home different books. I've seen you order different milkshakes at Sugar Cube Corner. Just last month after your Whinny Land trip, Sweetie Belle told me how you didn't go with your sisters to the Haunted Stable so you could help Gemstone with a crazy matchmaking scheme. Let's not forget the fact that you started dating *way* before your sisters."

Raspberry blushed slightly at that.

"You all have different skills," Cheese continued. "Blueberry has her photographic memory, Cherry is as almost as fast a party cannon shooter as your mother, and you, Raspberry, I've read your stories and poems for class, and I don't need to see the grades to know that you're an excellent writer. Now, it wouldn't be fair as a father to say you're better than your sisters, but your tone and style is definitely unique from theirs. You could take the names off the papers and I'd be able to tell which of you wrote what."

Raspberry huffed. "You're just saying that because you're our dad."

"Maybe," he said with a shrug. "But get real. Who knows you girls better than me? Other than your mom, of course."

Smiling, Raspberry gave her father a hug. "Thanks, Dad. Still, because we always go in alphabetical order for reports, mine's gonna be last, so every pony would've heard the story twice already by the time I get to read mine."

"Hey," Cheese said, ruffling her mane, " *you* never get tired of hearing our story, do you?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Then you've got nothing to worry about."

She sighed sadly. "I hope not."

My moms met when they were fillies. They're not my real moms since I was adopted, but I know them better so I decided to write this report about them. They met at a party in Ponyville while Mommy Bon-Bon and Mommy Lyra were both on vacation. Then they met again years later. Mommy Lyra moved to Ponyville first, then Mommy Bon-Bon. They met at a park bench. They were best friends until their friend Derpy locked them in a closet so they could confess their feelings for each other. They got married and adopted me. The End.

Raspberry put down the paper and stared at Lemon Drop, who was sitting across from her on her bedroom floor. He noticed her frown immediately.

"Just give it to me straight," he said, hanging his head. "It stinks."

"It's…a good start," Raspberry said. "I mean you've got the main points down. You've just got to weave them together in a way that the story flows better. You get what I'm saying?"

He shook his head. "Not really."

"Okay," she said, pointing to the top of the page. "You can't just list a bunch of events. You gotta connect them with one underlying theme. In other words, you gotta consider what your story's about."

"It's about my moms meeting and falling in love."

"Yes, but what makes their love story any different from every other love story in the world? It doesn't have to be groundbreaking. You just gotta think about what the story means to *you* ."

Rubbing his chin, Lemon Drop took the paper back to read it over. "But what if I *don't* know?"

"Hey," she said with a shrug, "sometimes *I* don't even know what my

story's about until the fifteenth draft. At some point, the whole thing just clicks."

"Well," he said, examining the report, "I suppose if my moms hadn't met, I would've stayed an orphan."

"Okay, good. What else?"

"I don't know." He scratched his head. "They met at a party. I guess if that party hadn't happened, they wouldn't have…"

Then he looked up at Raspberry with wide eyes.

"What?" she asked.

"I…just remembered something I didn't remember before."

"What?" She leaned forward in anticipation. "What?!"

He smirked. "I'll tell you later."

She pouted as she sat back in disappointment.

"So how's your story coming along?" Lemon Drop asked.

Sighing, he showed him a blank page. "I just don't know where to begin."

"Still thinking about how you'll sound like your sisters?"

She nodded slowly.

"Well… *I* don't think you're completely like your sisters."

She looked up at him. "Really?"

"Yeah. I mean…I'm dating *you* , aren't I? If you were all exactly the same, wouldn't I be dating all three of you?"

Raspberry couldn't help but chuckle at the thought of him dating all three of them at once. "I suppose not." Then she frowned. "Still, I can't think of a unique angle to this assignment."

"Well…what's *your* story about?"

As she pondered, she stared at the blank sheet and tugged on her mane. "Daddy first saw Mommy when they were foals, at a party she threw which led him to becoming a party pony too, and then years later they competed to see who could party more, and then they met again while Dad was in disguise at *another* party…"

Lemon Drop laughed. "Doesn't really *sound* like they knew they were meant for each other right away."

"I guess not. I mean Mom *hated* Dad when they met, downright jealous of him! She didn't even notice him the first time. If you think about it, it took *several* meetings before they actually…"

She trailed off, her eyes becoming bigger than Lemon Drop had ever seen them.

"Razz?" he asked in concern.

"Sorry, Lemony!" she exclaimed, hastily pushing him out of the room. "I've just had a huge brainstorm!"

As she slammed the door on him, Lemon Drop smiled proudly. "That's my girl."

Hearts and Hooves Day arrived. Every pony was eager to open their boxes to read their cards, but first Mrs. Cheerilee had the students read their reports. As each foal went up, Raspberry became more and more nervous.

"And so," Gemstone said, pointing to a poster bearing of pictures of her parents, "in Mummy, Daddy found a true equal. She was refined, but independent and clever, and he was the kind, courteous stallion she'd always dreamed of finding. And they continue to be equals to this day, as Mummy runs her chain of boutiques, and Daddy runs Ponyville, all while taking care of their two beautiful fillies together. That's why I believe the keys to a happy marriage are equality and mutual respect."

The class applauded, Cherry clapping the loudest.

"Very well done, Gemstone," Cheerilee said, making a note on her clipboard. "And I love the visual aid you provided. A+!"

Gemstone squealed in delight as she skipped back to her seat.

"Great job," Prism whispered as her friend sat down beside her.

"I have you to thank for being my test audience," Gemstone replied.

"Prism, you're next!" Mrs. Cheerilee called.

Raspberry tapped her hoof on her desk as Prism read her report. She tried listening, but she was still thinking about how good Gemstone's was. It really was, for she had tied all the events together with a solid theme and had established the relationship of her parents very well. She only hoped her report was just as good.

"And then Mom swooped in and rescued Dad!" Prism exclaimed, making swooping motions with her hoof. "Again! And she would keep saving him for many times to come! Like that time she got cold hooves the night before their wedding and she had to save him from choking on chopsticks!"

When Prism was finished and the class clapped, Raspberry entangled her back hooves. It was almost Blueberry's turn. Next would be Cherry's, then hers.

What if my story's not unique enough? What if the class gets bored with the story before they hear mine? What if I look like a copycat?!

"Lemon Drop?" Mrs. Cheerilee said. "Are you ready?"

Lemon Drop nodded shyly as he stood up from his desk. Raspberry tried to shake her nerves off.

Now's not the time to worry. You've gotta relax and support your boyfriend the way he supports you.

When Lemon Drop got to the front of the classroom, he locked eyes with Raspberry. She tried giving him an encouraging smile, but

thanks to her anxiousness, it came out all crooked. Nevertheless, Lemon Drop grinned in return and took a deep breath.

"It's funny how fate can work in mysterious ways," he began in a calm, clear voice. "My birth parents died when I was very little, but I was lucky to be adopted by two wonderful mares I'm proud to call my moms. If it hadn't been for them, I'd still be in that orphanage, all alone. But the more I hear their story, the more I realize that my moms are not the only ones I have to thank for my adoption."

Raspberry cocked her head curiously. This draft was *way* different from his first one.

"First of all, I have my moms' friend Derpy to thank, for if she hadn't locked them in a closet, they wouldn't have confessed their true feelings for each other."

The class giggled.

"But the pony I *really* have to thank was some pony who would play an even bigger role in my life. For without her, my moms wouldn't have even met in the first place." He looked back at his paper. "Even though my moms didn't really become friends until they were adults, they first met when they were foals. Both of them were on vacation with their families in Ponyville, and there was a party going on in town, thrown by the resident party planner."

Raspberry straightened up in her seat, staring at him in bewilderment.

"Pinkie Pie was her name, also known as," he said, locking eyes with Raspberry again, "the future mom of the most influential pony in my life."

Raspberry blinked, her jaw dropping. Lemon Drop simply smiled.

"Raspberry Strudel Pie is more than just my girlfriend. She's my best friend, the one who always sticks by me when I'm in a jam, who never gives up on me. That's how my moms feel about each other, and I only hope that someday, my relationship with Raspberry can be just as strong, for although we didn't know it, we shared a

connection before we were even born." He lowered his paper. "The End."

Raspberry was slow to join the applause. She was too stunned to speed up her hooves.

"That was beautiful, Lemon Drop!" Cheerilee said. "Your best work yet! You connected your parents' relationship to your current one, which made it all the more personal! A+!"

As Lemon Drop sat back down, he looked over at his girlfriend. "So what did you…?"

She sprang forward, cutting him off with a hug. Grinning, Lemon Drop hugged her back. There were a few "aw's" and "ew's" from the class.

"Isn't that sweet?" Cheerilee said, wiping away a tear. "Next up is Blueberry Pie!"

"Uh-oh," Raspberry murmured, pulling away from Lemon Drop.

"Don't worry," he whispered. "They won't be the same."

Blueberry bounded to the front and cleared her throat. "The first time Mom and Dad met, they were foals. Dad had run away from home and came to Ponyville where little Mom was throwing a party. She didn't see him, but he saw her, and he was inspired to become a party planner too. Years later, they met again while Mom was planning Aunt Rainbow Dash's birth-aversary."

Prism raised her hoof proudly.

"Dad had been led there by his Cheesy Sense, and wanted to plan the party too. Mom challenged him to a Goof Off, but when she saw Auntie Rainbow wasn't having fun, she forfeited, but then Dad apologized and they decided to plan the party together. Mom and Dad wrote letters to each other, until Dad started disguising himself as Red Shoes to run away from an ex-girlfriend who was really just trying to give his scarf back. He performed a party in Ponyville as a clown slash magician, and Mom was there. They started going out, but Mom figured out it was him right away. When Mom got pregnant

with me and my sisters—it was *not* the stork, by the way—Dad immediately proposed! And they've been living happily ever after ever since!"

As the class clapped, Raspberry scrunched her muzzle. "Huh."

"What's wrong?" Lemon Drop asked.

"Nothing, just," she said, turning to him, "that wasn't anything like I wrote *at all* ."

"Good job, Blueberry," Cheerilee said. "That's quite a story, although a bit heavy on the telling and not enough showing. B+."

"Sweet!" Blueberry said, shooting her hooves up as she hopped back to her seat.

"Cherry, you're next."

Cherry bounced up to the front and pulled her report out of her mane.

"The Story of How My Mom and Dad Met!" she read aloud. "It was obvious my parents were going to get together, because they're both super-duper party ponies who love to make ponies laugh and smile and get crazy together! All the times they met were at a party first when they were foals next when they were grown-ups and third when Daddy was running from the law." She snorted. "Just kidding he was running from his crazy ex-girlfriend who wasn't so crazy and looked a lot like Mom.

"Anyway, all those times they instantly knew they were meant for each other because they had so much in common I mean why *wouldn't* they get together you'd have to be crazy not to ship them! Good thing Mom knew Dad was really Dad right away otherwise he would've lied to his one true love all his life and then their whole marriage would've been a lie and then our family would've been a lie even if he didn't tell us his real name for the longest time. But it's a good thing she found out otherwise they wouldn't have had that night of passion and then got married so we wouldn't be born out of wedlock!"

A few foals murmured in confusion, while some foals like the other two Tri-Pies and Kicks nodded knowingly.

"Err, thank you, Cherry, for that," Cheerilee stammered, " *honest* approach. Although there were quite a few run-on sentences, and some points where you went off track. I'll give you a B."

"Okay!" Cherry chimed, jumping back to her desk.

"Raspberry, are you ready?"

Kicks grumbled in the back. "Do we have to hear that story *again* ?"

"Now, Kicks…"

"It *is* the same story," Raspberry said, picking up her paper, "but I didn't write it the way my sisters did. It's different, I swear."

Cheerilee smiled. "I'm sure it is, Raspberry. Why don't you come up and share your version of the story?"

Biting her lip, Raspberry stood up from her seat and walked nervously to the front. She locked gaze with Lemon Drop, who mouthed, "You got this."

Closing her eyes, and taking a deep breath, she began. "My mom and dad have told me the story of how they met a hundred and twelve times, but for some reason, I never get tired of it. It wasn't until recently that I realized why.

"Each time I hear the story, something changes. Whether it's a small detail my parents suddenly remember, or the order of events. The most significant change was when my dad finally revealed that he'd been some pony else this whole time, and that there was a whole lot more to the story than they had let on before.

"Their very first meeting wasn't really a meeting at all. Dad, a shy, friendless little colt, ran away from his home in Manehattan to find his place in the world. He stumbled into Ponyville one afternoon by chance where a big celebration was taking place. He was entranced by the music, the cheer, the laughter, the smiles on every pony's faces.

"And then he saw her, the source of all that cheer. A young, pink filly with hair like cotton candy. There she was, standing on a beach ball, juggling rubber chickens, the most exuberant pony he'd ever laid eyes on. That moment, he was inspired to spread the same amount of cheer to every pony, just the way she did.

"Dad traveled all Equestria, doing just what he'd vowed, until chance brought him back to Ponyville, back to her, his super-duper party pony. He wanted to impress her, show her how much he'd inspired her, but instead she was plagued with jealousy and challenged him for the title of Ultimate Super-Duper Party Planner.

"There was no telling who would've won, had she not chosen friendship over her pride. Before she could leave Ponyville in shame, he ran to stop her and told her the truth. Touched by his story, she agreed to work with him instead of against him, and together they created a party to top all parties.

"Unfortunately, the call of other parties bade him to go, but he left her his special rubber chicken friend as a memento of his visit. Years passed, and their admiration for each other grew over time, until chance brought them together again. Although Dad was pretending to be some pony else, Mom was not so easily fooled. Even though he was a different pony, their feelings for each other had not changed."

Raspberry paused a moment to look up at the class. "Each time my parents met, it was the same, but different. Each time was at a party, but each time, they were different ponies. Dad was a shy colt, then a zany party planner wanting to impress his muse, then a zany clown slash magician running from his fears instead of facing them. Mom didn't notice him at first, then she hated him, until finally, she welcomed him with opened hooves.

"If you think about it, relationships are a lot like stories. They are never the same every time you read or hear them, but always changing." She smiled at Lemon Drop. "You're always learning new things about the pony you're with." She glanced at her sisters. "You might look at your relationship at a different angle, but the feelings remain the same."

She looked back at the class. "And as you listen to the story over and over, your thoughts on it will change, but you will never grow tired of it, just like my Mom and Dad never grow tired of each other." She placed the paper behind her back. "Thank you."

There was a moment of silence. Raspberry gulped, thinking that she had failed in her task.

Then the room erupted in applause.

"Bravo, bravo!" Gemstone shouted, standing up.

"That was even better than mine!" Cherry exclaimed, clapping her hooves rapidly.

Blueberry sniffed as tears came to her eyes. "That was the most beautiful version yet!"

"I knew you could do it, Razz!" Lemon Drop cheered.

"Read it again, read it again!" Kicks called from the back.

As Raspberry looked around the room and heard their praises, her heart pounded with pride. *They liked it! They* really *liked it!*

She'd done it. She'd taken a story the class had already heard twice and made it different. According to her sisters, she had made it *better* ! The class even wanted her to read it again!

The best part was: she *loved* it! She had created something that every pony liked, and she *loved* it! She *was* different from her sisters! And that was okay. They had their talents, and she had hers.

Suddenly, the applause stopped and every pony's eyes became wide.

"No way!" Prism shouted, standing up from her desk.

Raspberry looked around the room in confusion. Gemstone put her hoof to her mouth, Kicks' jaw dropped, while Lemon Drop wore a big smile. Some foals murmured while others pointed and a few uttered "oohs" and "ah's."

"What's every pony looking at?" Raspberry asked.

"It's your cutie mark, sis!" Blueberry exclaimed.

Raspberry stiffened. "What?!"

"Look!" Cherry cried, pointing.

Twisting her head around, Raspberry looked down at her flank and gasped. There it was. Her cutie mark.

And she laughed, wondering why it hadn't occurred to her sooner.

The image was of two yellow pencils bent to form a heart, their tips connecting at the inverted point. Inside the pencil heart was a raspberry.

"You're a writer!" Lemon Drop said.

"I'm a writer," Raspberry said, jumping up and down. "I'm a writer!"

"Of love stories, no less!" Blueberry exclaimed.

"You did it, sis!" Cherry shouted.

"I'm a writer!" Raspberry cheered, still bouncing. "I'm a writer! I'm a writer!"

"Congratulations, Raspberry!" Cheerilee shouted, attempting to be heard over her excitement. "You certainly went above and beyond expecta—"

"I'm a writer, I'm a writer!"

"Okay, calm down now and—"

Just then, Raspberry grabbed Lemon Drop and gave him a huge smack on the lips.

"Gross!" grumbled Gruffle, the filly-hating colt from the second row.

"This is all thanks to you, my Lemony Drop!" Raspberry said, squeezing her coltfriend hard. "You were such a big help! I'm a

writer, I can't believe it! I'm a writer! I'm a wr—"

Cheerilee's hoof on her shoulder cut her off. "Um, Raspberry? We still have three more reports to hear."

Blushing, Raspberry returned to her seat, but not before sending Lemon Drop a wink.

"I think that report warrants an A+. Kicks, you're up next."

"Aw," Kicks groaned. "Now how am I gonna top *that* ?!"

With a chuckle, Lemon Drop gently took Raspberry's hoof beneath her desk, which made her giggle too.

I've known Raspberry would be a writer since Chapter 3, and since her name reminded me of raspberry kisses, I decided to make her the more romantic and sensitive one of the Tri-Pies. From that sprang the idea that she'd be the ideal triplet to get a boyfriend first, and since that seemed to help her break away from her sisters into a more unique individual, she became the most likely to earn her cutie mark first.

The poem at the beginning is a part of a poem I wrote in fifth grade, which played a vital role in my own "cutie mark" moment. When I read the poem in class, everyone loved it and wanted me to read it over and over. It was then I realized I had a knack for writing and I enjoyed doing it. That's where I got the idea for Raspberry's realization, and I've been saving this chapter for the right moment.

There's actually one more Valentine's-themed chapter planned. Hopefully that will be finished before actual Valentine's Day.

El Tango de Triángulos

Phew! Just in time for Valentine's Day! Takes place directly after the previous chapter.

It was the class' annual Hearts and Hooves Day party and the foals were opening their boxes of cards. At least some were, while others were admiring Raspberry's new cutie mark.

"I'm so proud of you, sis!" Blueberry said, embracing her sister.

"You're not mad that I got my cutie mark before you girls, are you?" Raspberry asked.

"Of course not!" Cherry chimed. "I mean it would've been nice for us to all get cutie marks together but we all know you're the best writer in class, maybe even Ponyville!"

"And you were always reading those romance novels and writing poems for every pony each holiday," Blueberry said.

Raspberry beamed. "Thanks, girls."

In the back of the room, Prism was finishing reading Gemstone's cards aloud.

"These colts said quite a few nice things about you, Gem," Prism said. "Just look at Dunkin's." She held up a basketball shaped card. " *You've got me like a slam dunk* . He must really like you to be making a basketball metaphor, Gem."

"I suppose," Gemstone said with a sigh. "But I rather like the card you made." She held up a heart-shaped rainbow-colored card with a painted picture of herself and Prism holding hooves. "You really do paint beautifully."

"And I like the bracelet you made me," Prism said, showing off the

rainbow-beaded bracelet on her hoof. "Tops the one you made last year."

Gemstone grinned. "I thought I'd personalize it this year instead of using generic Hearts and Hooves Day colors."

"Hey, Prism."

The fillies looked up to see Kicks standing over him, his face a beet red. Prism gave him a polite smile while Gemstone narrowed her gaze.

"Did you," he said, circling his hoof in the floor, "like my card?"

"Oh yeah," Prism said, getting out his card.

It was a red heart-shaped card with a picture of a penguin on it. The message read: *To Penguin, my awesome new friend.*

"Better than the one you gave me last year," Prism said.

"Really?" Kicks said, wondering exactly which card she meant.

"Yeah, cuz this was given as a friend, not as an enemy."

"Right," he said, clearing his throat. "Friends. That's what we are now. Cool."

"Although I hardly think continuing to use that cruel nickname," Gemstone grumbled, folding her hooves, "which refers to Prism's inability to fly, about which she is highly sensitive, is something a *friend* would do."

"I don't really mind, Gem," Prism said. "He's called me that for so long, right now it's more like a playful nickname than a hurtful one. Besides," she looked at him with a blush, "I'm kind of used to it."

Kicks smiled as he backed away. "Well, glad you liked the card. I'm gonna go congratulate Raspberry on her cutie m—AH!"

He shrieked as he tripped over his desk. Quickly catching himself, he stood upright. He chuckled awkwardly before turning around and

running.

Prism snickered. "He's so much more goofier now that he's stopped being a bully."

"That's not the word I'd use," Gemstone muttered under her breath.

Prism sighed. "I know you still don't trust him after all those times he's picked on us, Gem, but he's really not that bad."

The unicorn huffed. "A leopard cannot change his spots so easily."

"Why not? *You* changed. When we first met, you were real snooty, but now you're one of the coolest ponies I know."

Gemstone blushed. "Thank you."

"Hi, Gem!" Cherry piped, walking up to her desk. "Thanks for the bracelet!" She showed off the bracelet with a swan charm on her hoof. "It matches the necklace you gave me!"

"Oh, yes," Gemstone said, turning her attention abruptly to her. "And I liked your card. The little swans you drew were darling."

"Thanks," Cherry said, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "I mean I don't draw as good as Prism here who's the best artist in the class but I think I did a pretty good job although Blueberry thought they were turkeys because they were so fat and…"

She placed her hoof over her mouth and ran.

"That was weird," Prism said.

"Yes," Gemstone said, blinking in bewilderment. "I'm not sure why, but Cherry's been acting…odd. And I mean more than usual."

The pegasus shrugged. "Probably excited about her sister's cutie mark."

"Is she having a *cute - ceañera* ?"

"Knowing her parents, they're probably gonna combine it with their

annual Hearts and Hooves Day party the same way they combined my mom's birthday and moving to Ponyville anniversary."

"Speaking of which," Gemstone said, shifting in her seat, "are you attending tonight?"

"Oh, sure. I never miss a Pie party."

"And," the unicorn said, twirling her mane on her hoof, "are you going… *with* any pony in particular?"

"I thought we'd just all be hanging out together as a group. You know, you, me and the other Crusaders. Especially now that we're celebrating Raspberry's cutie mark."

"Right," Gemstone said, clearing her throat. "Of course."

"Alright, my little ponies!" Mrs. Cheerilee called. "Who wants to play Pin the Tail on the Pony?"

While the majority of the foals flocked to the game setup on the wall, Raspberry noticed Kicks sitting glumly in the far corner of the room.

"Hey, sis, you coming?" Blueberry asked, holding up a fake blue tail.

"Err, yeah," Raspberry said. "I'll catch up. I've just got a little something in my hoof."

Her sister shrugged and hopped over to the game. When she was sure she wasn't looking, Raspberry went over to the sad pegasus colt in the corner.

"You okay, dude?" Raspberry asked, kneeling down to his level.

Kicks huffed. "What's it to you?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. You just look a bit…down."

"Well, I *am* sitting."

"Uh-huh," Raspberry said, glancing over at Prism and Gemstone conversing with each other at their desks. "This wouldn't have to do

with the fact that it's Hearts and Hooves Day and you *really* want Prism to be your super special some pony, would it?"

Kicks blushed fiercely and opened his mouth to protest.

"Don't try denying it!" she exclaimed, holding up her hoof. "Or did you forget you'd already spilled the beans with me when we were working on that presentation?"

Kicks sighed in defeat. "She doesn't hate me anymore, that much I know, and I like how we're friends and not picking on each other, but…"

Raspberry crossed her hooves knowingly. "You want more."

He nodded. "But she doesn't like me. Not in the way I want her to."

"How do you know that?"

"She told me! At Whinny Land!"

"But that was a whole month ago! Maybe her feelings have changed."

He shook his head. "No. I said I'd back off until she's ready."

"You keep doing that, buddy, and you're gonna be waiting for her the rest of your life." She sat down beside him. "Listen. I learned my lesson when it comes to meddling in ponies' romantic lives without their permission, but," she said, batting her eyes, "if you asked me *nicely* …"

He looked at her incredulously. "You really think you can set me up with Prism?"

"Why not?" she said, nudging him in the side. "It's Hearts and Hooves Day. Plus, since I got my cutie mark, I've been in a good mood."

He glanced at her cutie mark. "You *do* seem to know your lovey-dovey stuff. And you *are* one of the two fillies in this class to get a boyfriend before middle school."

"Only to be topped by Sweet Stuff," Raspberry said, looking over at the purple filly who was blindfolded as her boyfriend Fox Trot spun her around. "So what do you say?"

"I don't know," Kicks said, narrowing his eyes suspiciously. "Last time I made a deal with one of you Pies, I nearly got in trouble for beating up your boyfriend."

"Yeah, good point. But I'm not blue-mailing you into beating up my boyfriend. I'm helping you get with your one true love." She put her hoof around him. "And what better time to win her over than the day of love?"

Kicks lifted his head and gazed at Prism, who was laughing with her unicorn friend. Then he glanced over at Raspberry's wide and expectant smile. After a few moments, he sighed in surrender.

"What've I got to lose?"

Meanwhile, while waiting in line for the game, Cherry was staring wistfully at Gemstone as she talked with Prism. Hearing the sound of her laugh made Cherry smile.

"Hey, Blueberry?" she said, turning to her sister, who was waiting in line in front of her. "Could you…?"

Blueberry replied without turning around. "Help you concoct a cockamamie scheme to get Gem to *like* you, like you instead of just like you and possibly become your super special some pony because it's Hearts and Hooves Day and which makes it the ideal romantic setting?"

Cherry blinked. "Um, yeah."

Blueberry shrugged. "Yeah, I'm down for that."

That afternoon, Raspberry entered Carousel Boutique with a very nervous Kicks in tow.

"Raspberry, darling!" Rarity said, looking up from the dress dummy

she'd been sewing on. "I just heard the news!" She raced up to the filly and looked down at her flank. "Oh, sweetie! That cutie mark matches your coat perfectly! I assume you're here looking for a cute-ceañera gown? Luckily for you, I have plenty of emergency gown designs for occasions such as this!"

"Sounds great, Aunt Rarity!" Raspberry exclaimed. "Though my friend Kicks here needs a little something for tonight too." She put her hoof around him. "See, he's got this crush on some pony in our class…"

Rarity squealed, already taking measurements. "Say no more! I have just the thing!"

The unicorn zipped off and Kicks gulped. "I'm not so sure about this…"

"Trust me," Raspberry said, patting her on the back. "This'll work. I don't know what it is with you guys in suits, but it makes us girls go *crazy* ! Once Prism sees you in a suit, she won't see you as a colt anymore, but a full-grown stallion!"

Kicks blinked. "But…wouldn't that be weird if I'm a full-grown stallion and she's still a filly?"

She smacked herself in the forehead. "This is gonna be harder than I thought."

Rarity returned with a small tuxedo and a simple red dress. "I can make some modifications, but I want to check your sizes first. Why don't you two go try these on?"

The tuxedo and dress fell into Kicks' and Raspberry's hooves and the two foals rushed to the dressing rooms in the back. Just then, the bell above the door jingled again and Blueberry and Cherry bounced in.

"Good afternoon, you two," Rarity greeted. "What a coincidence! Your sister was just…"

"Cherry needs an emergency wooing gown, stat!" Blueberry exclaimed.

Rarity blinked at the abrupt request. "I beg your pardon?"

"Cherry, crush, needs to impress." Blueberry pointed to the unicorn. "Kapeesh?"

Rarity shook her head and grinned understandingly. "Yes, of course. Wait one moment, Cherry, I have just the gown in mind!"

As Rarity trotted away, Cherry whispered to her sister, "You sure we should be asking help from the mother of the object of my affections?"

"Not if you keep your crush anonymous," Blueberry replied. "And you know how Gemstone appreciates some pony who makes an effort to look their best. And who knows her taste better than her mother?"

On her way to the sewing room an hour later, Rarity passed by her daughter's ajar bedroom door. She paused and went back to peer inside. She found Gemstone at her vanity, her mane and tail rolled up messily into curlers as she slopped on lipstick. Her eyes were heavy with green eyeshadow and mascara, her cheeks caked in rouge.

"What in the world?" Rarity said, coming into the room. "What's all this, darling?"

Gemstone jumped and spun around. "Mummy! I was just…"

"Is that my makeup kit?" her mother asked, pointing to the clutter of lipsticks and mascara tubes on the vanity.

"I, um," Gemstone said, biting her red lip, "didn't think you would mind. I just…wanted to borrow it for the party tonight."

Rarity raised an eyebrow. "You've never wanted to borrow my makeup before."

"I know, but…" The filly hung her head. "It's Hearts and Hooves Day and…I want tonight to be special, because I…well, I want to look my

best because…"

Rarity smiled knowingly. "Here, let me."

Using her magic, she levitated a face wipe to clean the makeup off her daughter's face. Then she gently took the curlers out of her pretty blue mane and tail.

"It helps to comb your mane out into at least four sections before putting the curlers in," Rarity said, lifting up a comb with her magic to run through her daughter's mane, "the same goes for the tail."

Gemstone sat still as her mother tenderly combed her mane and tail. She winced as Rarity tugged on each section so she could roll the curlers in.

"The important thing is not to brush your hair after you release the curlers," Rarity said. "It will ruin your fresh curls."

"No brushing," Gemstone said with a small nod. "Got it."

Once she was finished with the curls, Rarity placed her hooves on her daughter's shoulders and looked at their reflection in the mirror.

"You know," she said proudly, "you really don't need that much makeup, darling. You're a beautiful young filly."

Gemstone gazed at herself and sighed. "But am I beautiful enough?"

"Here's a secret, sweetie," Rarity said in a whisper. "Makeup is not intended to make you beautiful. It is meant to highlight the aspects of your beauty that are already there. For instance," she said, levitating a brush of pink blush, "your pretty face."

Gemstone giggled as the brush lightly touched her cheeks, giving them a soft pink glow.

"And your gorgeous eyes," Rarity said, getting eyeshadow. "They're as blue as sapphires, and should be accented accordingly."

The filly closed her eyes as her mother traced the brush along her

eyelids. When she opened them, she saw that the blue eyeshadow was very light, but her eyes miraculously seemed brighter!

"Now for the mascara?!" she asked excitedly.

"Err," Rarity said, biting her lip, "perhaps you should wait until you're a little older for mascara."

"What about lipstick?"

Rarity shook her head. "Why fix what isn't broken?"

She playfully touched her daughter's lips, making her laugh.

"So…what's his name?" Rarity said, levitating a brush for her daughter's fur.

"What?" Gemstone said, stiffening.

"Oh, come now. I know you like dressing up, but you've never made *this* much of an effort before. Who are you trying to impress?"

Gemstone's face became pinker. "W-Well…there is some pony I've, um… *fancied* for quite some time now."

"I see," Rarity said, grinning further. "Is it that sweet little gentlecolt who plays basketball? I saw you dancing with him last Hearts and Hooves Day."

"N-No," Gemstone said, lowering her head. "This is…some pony else." She looked back at her reflection. "Do you think this will be enough?"

"Of course, darling," Rarity said, putting down the brush. "Beauty aside, you are the kindest, sweetest, most passionate little filly I know, and no matter how you look, this secret crush of yours is going to *adore* you!"

She tickled her tummy, making the filly giggle.

"Although," Rarity said with a wink, levitating her sketchbook into view, "it never hurts to have a stunning ensemble on hoof."

"You didn't have to fly me to the party," Prism told her sister while riding on her back through Ponyville. "You could've just dropped me on the ground and I would've walked the rest of the way."

"Maybe I just wanted an excuse to hang out with my favorite little sister," Lightning Dash said.

Prism narrowed her eyes. "Seriously, why are you doing this?"

Lightning sighed. "Okay, you've got me. I had to do *something* today. Thunder Dash is out with Apple Blossom, all my other friends have their sweethearts, and Aunt Scootaloo is playing with the CMC at a wedding somewhere. At least if I take you to this party, I won't be alone on Hearts and Hooves Day."

"You don't have a date?" the filly asked in surprise.

She shook her head.

"Didn't you have a date last Hearts and Hooves Day?"

"Yup, but it was a blind date," Lightning said with a groan. "The dude and I had nothing in common. I don't know what it is with stallions, but none of them seem to do it for me."

"Maybe colts aren't your thing," Prism said as they approached the Party Palace.

Lightning Dash laughed as she landed at the entrance. "Maybe colts aren't my…" She stopped, her expression becoming thoughtful. "Huh."

"Don't feel too bad," Prism said, sliding off her back. "I don't have a date either."

"Really?" Lightning said, cocking her head. "Not even that Kicks kid who's always picking on you?"

"What?" the filly said, blushing hard. "Who…who said anything about…?"

"Oh come on," the older mare said, rolling her eyes. "It's obvious he likes you. Every pony knows that when a foal picks on another foal, it's because they like 'em. They pretend to hate 'em so no pony knows they like 'em."

Blinking, Prism tapped her chin. "When you put it that way, it almost sounds…abusive."

Lightning shrugged. "Only if they never grow out of it. Besides, you always hit him back, don't you?"

"Not lately," Prism said, folding her hooves behind her back. "I mean we've kind of been on a friendly truce, so we haven't been mean to each other for a while. But I don't know if we're ready for anything like a date. We *are* ten, after all."

"What about your friends Raspberry and Lemon Drop?" Lightning asked. "They're you're age and they've been dating for months."

"Maybe *they're* ready, but I know *I'm* not."

The teenager smiled. "Well then, here's to us single ladies."

Prism giggled as her sister nudged her playfully.

"We better get in there," Lightning said, tilting her head towards the Party Palace. "You're gonna wanna congratulate your friend on her cutie mark."

"Right," Prism said, rushing inside.

Lightning was about to follow her when she heard a familiar voice.

"You're not nervous, are you, bro?"

She turned to see a white unicorn mare her age with red, white and blue hair and red eyes. Her cutie mark was a squirt of toothpaste that matched her striped mane. Walking at her side was Crest, a unicorn colt from Prism's class.

"Maybe a little," Crest said, looking at the ground. "She didn't say anything about the dental hygiene kit I put in her box."

"News flash, little bro," the mare said with a glinting smile. "Not every pony's into dental hygiene like us. Maybe if you were interested in what *she* likes, she'll be more interested in you."

"I…guess I could try that." He smiled as he rushed inside the building. "Thanks, Aqua."

"Aquafresh?" Lightning Dash said.

The mare looked up and gasped. "Lightning! Oh my gosh! How long has it been?"

Lightning shrugged. "A while. I haven't seen much of you since we graduated from elementary school."

"I've been busy," Aquafresh said, digging her hoof at the ground, "helping my mom at the dental clinic."

Lightning smirked. "You were always going on and on about dental hygiene."

The unicorn giggled. "So what are you doing here?"

"Just dropping off my little sister. It's one of her best friend's *cute-ceañera* ."

"And I was dropping off my little brother." She chuckled. "It's his crush's sister's *cute-ceañera* ."

"Which one? Blueberry or Cherry?"

"Blueberry."

"Oh, good," Lightning said, sighing in relief. "He probably has a better chance then." She leaned forward to whisper. "Between you and me, I don't think Cherry's into colts."

"Wow," Aquafresh said with a laugh. "That certainly *would* be a problem." She held up her hooves defensively. "Not that I'm against that sort of thing! It would just ruin his chances!"

"Oh no, I get it. I'm not against that sort of thing either."

"You aren't?" She blushed. "Well, I suppose…that's good, I guess."

There was a lull in their conversation and they stood at the door awkwardly.

"You going in or," Lightning said, pointing to the door, "do you have other plans?"

Aquafresh shook her head. "Mom's out with Dad. I'm pretty much alone tonight. Pretty pathetic, right?"

"Not really. I'm alone tonight too."

"Really?" the unicorn said in surprise.

"Really."

Aquafresh looked at her thoughtfully. "Err…you know, since we're both alone, we could…maybe be alone…together?" She winced. "That sounded stupid. I mean that we should…"

Smirking, Lightning Dash opened the door with a bow. "After you."

The unicorn giggled as she stepped inside.

The Party Palace was decorated in paper hearts and pony cherubs. The pink disco ball above shone pink specs of light all over, dancing across the party guests. DJ Pon-3 was at the turntable, mixing romantic violin music with dubstep.

In the center of the room, Raspberry was crowded by ponies congratulating her. She wore a velvet red dress with a puffed out skirt just short enough to expose her flank so she could show off her cutie mark.

"I'm really happy for you, Raspberry," Prism said. "Though…does this mean you won't be crusading with us anymore?"

"Oh, we can still hang out," Raspberry said, "even though I won't be aiming to get my cutie mark now that I know what it is."

"Maybe we just won't be going to meetings as much," Lemon Drop

said.

"Huh?" Raspberry and Prism said, turning to him in confusion.

"I mean," the colt said, blushing as he rubbed the back of his neck, "I just thought…since both of us have our cutie marks…we could have more time to…" He looked at his girlfriend nervously. "…do stuff… together…the two of us?"

Raspberry looked away shyly, and Prism couldn't help but smile as she glanced between the two of them. "Hey, if you two wanna skip out on Crusader meetings for some alone time, that's fine with me. In fact, why don't you two start now by dancing together?"

Lemon Drop and Raspberry blushed, the latter giggling as she held out her hoof. The colt gulped as he slowly took it it. As soon as they made contact, Raspberry pulled him onto the dancefloor. Prism sighed dreamily as she watched them.

"Gee, Prism," Blueberry said, walking up to the pegasus. "I don't think I've ever seen you this starry-eyed."

"Hmm?" Prism said, turning to her. "Oh, I was just…thinking about how happy Raspberry looks having her cutie mark and everything and…" She blinked when she finally noticed Cherry standing next to her sister. "What's with the getup, Cherry?"

Cherry looked down at the dress Rarity had picked out for her. It was made of white with mid-length sleeves, accented with lace trimming and a red ribbon tied around her waist. Around her neck was the swan necklace Gemstone had given her months ago, its matching bracelet on her hoof.

"What, this old thing?" Cherry asked, waving her hoof. "I just thought I'd dress up a bit. You know, something simple and not too flashy so it doesn't outshine my sister on her special day." She put her hoof to her head and one on her hip as she pretended to pose for a camera. "But still looks dang good."

Prism narrowed her eyes. "What's his name?"

"What?" Cherry squeaked as sweat began trickling down her

forehead. "Whose n-name? Who said anything about impressing a special some pony? I know I didn't!"

With an eye roll, Prism said, "I'm not *totally* dense when it comes to crushes, you know. So who is he?"

Before Cherry could utter a word, Blueberry plugged her hoof into her sister's mouth. "I can assure you, Prism, that Cherry did not dress up for any colt whatsoever."

Cherry nodded rapidly, making Blueberry's hoof shake up and down.

"Fine," Prism said with a groan. " *Don't* tell me." Her expression became thoughtful as she gazed down at her hooves. "Though I can understand why you're hesitant to tell me. After all, I haven't been completely honest with you about—"

"Cherry, look!" Blueberry shouted suddenly, pointing to the door.

Cherry turned her head to the door, as did Prism. Quite a few heads turned, in fact, to the latest party guest.

Several tiny blue curls framed the unicorn filly's face like a doll, with five larger locks separated and curled out at the top. Her white face held a fresh tinge of rosiness, and her sapphire blue eyes were highlighted with light blue eyeshadow, which became especially apparent every time she blinked. Her red dress looked like something out of a tango movie sequence, for its long transparent sleeves had a lacelike design, and the hem was ruffled, angled up so that half of one back leg was exposed. The filly smiled in the direction of Cherry, Blueberry and Prism as she flipped one of her larger curls.

"Is that…Gemstone?" Lemon Drop asked.

Raspberry looked to the doorway and stopped dancing, her eyes widening.

"Whoa," Prism said in amazement.

"Whoa is right," Blueberry said with a nod.

Cherry, meanwhile, had her mouth wide open as her eyes focused on the radiant unicorn filly. *Sweet Celestia* , she thought as her knees started buckling, *it's like something out of my many dancing with Gemstone dreams slash fantasies!*

"Hello, girls," Gemstone said as she approached the fillies.

"Look at you, Gem!" Blueberry exclaimed, gesturing to her ensemble.

"Do you like it?" Gemstone asked, doing a turn.

"It's awesome!" Prism said in admiration. "You look ten years older!"

Color rose to the unicorn's cheeks. "Thank you, Prism."

"We love it!" Blueberry said, nudging her sister. "Don't we, Cherry?"

"Uh…uh…" Cherry choked on her words.

"But why the fancy outfit and makeup?" Prism asked.

"Oh," Gemstone said, smoothing out her skirt, "I felt like dressing for the occasion."

"Hey, just like Cherry!" Blueberry said, slapping her sister on the back.

"Oh my, Cherry!" Gemstone exclaimed, looking the red filly up and down. "You look simply divine! Mother always says red and white go well together. Almost reminds me of when we dressed in those white leotards for our swan ballet." She gasped. "Oh, and you're wearing the swan necklace I made you!"

Cherry's hoof moved to her swan charm, but she made no other movement as her unblinking eyes remained locked on the unicorn.

"It's her favorite necklace!" Blueberry said. "And she loves the bracelet that goes with it! Isn't that right, Cherry?" She waited for her sister to say something, but frowned when she was met with silence. "Cherry?"

Cherry then fell backward into her sister's hooves, her eyes still wide open.

"Cherry!" Prism exclaimed.

"Oh dear!" Gemstone said, putting her hoof to her mouth. "Whatever is the matter with her?"

Blueberry chuckled nervously. "Sugar shock. Too much candy!" She started dragging her semi-conscious sister away. "She'll be fine! I'll just take her to the punch bowl and pour some punch on her! Oomph!"

She cried out as she lost her grip on her sister.

"Here, let me help you," Prism said, rushing to grab one of Cherry's forelegs.

Gemstone watched with a half-lidded gaze as Prism and Blueberry dragged Cherry over to the snack table.

"Love the outfit, Gem!" said a young, female country voice.

Gemstone turned around. "Oh, Cinnamon Roll! How have you been? I have not really seen much of you this past year."

Cinnamon Roll shrugged. "Been busy helpin' my folks on the farm. Haven't really made time for socialization."

"Yes," the unicorn said with a nod. "I suppose we *wouldn't* see much of you. You *are* three years older than us, after all."

"Yup," Cinnamon Roll said, a twinge of annoyance in her voice. She looked at Gemstone curiously. "I know you're Aunt Rarity's kid and all, but I don't reckon ever seein' ya done up like this, except for maybe at the Grand Gallopin' Gala and Aunt Twilight's weddin'. And is that blush on yerr cheeks," she said with a smirk, "or are ya *that* flustered about some pony?"

Gemstone's cheeks suddenly became pinker. She put her hoof to one, as if trying to hide it.

"W-Well," she said with a small smile, "there… *is* some pony I'd like to…I mean it would be nice if…"

She glanced upward and Cinnamon Roll followed her gaze to the snack table where Blueberry and Prism were splashing punch on Cherry's face. Cherry sat up with a shriek, shaking her head, causing punch to splatter on her friends. The three of them laughed. Glancing back at Gemstone, Cinnamon Roll saw that she was giggling at the sight as well. Cinnamon Roll returned her gaze to the three laughing fillies and then back at the unicorn. Recalling a conversation she had shared with a certain red filly not too long ago, Cinnamon Roll smiled knowingly.

"Ya know," she said, "ya can start by askin' her to dance."

Gemstone stopped laughing, her face as red as a tomato. "W-What?! I…I didn't say it was…"

She trailed off as Cinnamon Roll placed her hoof on her shoulder. "Take it from some pony who's had crushes before. If you don't take the plunge, you'll never know if they'll like you back."

Gemstone looked up at the older filly and saw her assuring smile. After a moment, Gemstone began smiling too.

"Go to her," Cinnamon Roll whispered.

With a thankful nod, Gemstone rushed over to her friends while Cinnamon Roll chuckled to herself. "Maybe that apple was right after all."

"Feeling better, Cherry?" Gemstone asked as she approached her friends. "You took a rather nasty—"

"YOU'RE PRETTY!" Cherry blurted out, quickly covering her mouth.

The unicorn blinked. "Um…thank you. Good to see that you are back to normal."

"As normal as you can get with the Tri-Pies," Prism whispered snidely, making Gemstone giggle.

"Hey!" Blueberry shouted. Then after a moment's pause she shrugged. "Eh, can't really argue with that."

Gemstone swept a stray curl behind her ear. "Um…the music here is awfully…nice, so…I was wondering…"

"Love the dress, Gem!" Raspberry hollered, coming up to the group while holding Lemon Drop's hoof. "You look like a princess!"

"A *pretty* princess," Lemon Drop said.

Raspberry narrowed her eyes at him, making him gulp.

"I'm just being polite," he murmured.

Just then, Raspberry spotted a certain colt across the room, wearing a lovely black tuxedo. She saw how nervously Kicks was fiddling with his bowtie, which made her smirk.

"Would you excuse me a moment, sweetie?" Raspberry asked.

As she let go of his hoof, she whispered in his ear, "Remember what we discussed earlier?"

He caught sight of Kicks too and nodded to her. Giggling, Raspberry skipped across the room to the timid, well-dressed colt.

"This thing itches!" Kicks complained, scratching his belly.

"But you look adorable!" Raspberry said, swinging her hoof around his shoulder and pointing with her other hoof across the room.

Kicks gulped when he caught sight of Prism, who was laughing with her other friends. Blueberry glanced between Gemstone and Cherry, and then slipped away to the turntable. She whispered in DJ Pon-3's ear. The unicorn gave a silent nod and got out a new record.

Raspberry and Kicks looked up as tango music started playing.

"Perfect!" Raspberry said, placing her hooves firmly on his shoulders. "The tango is the *perfect* music for when you want to romance some pony!"

Kicks stiffened as she began pushing him towards Prism. "Oh no!" he cried, stepping out of her grasp. "I can't! I don't even know the tango!"

Raspberry sighed. "I was afraid you might say that."

She caught her boyfriend's eye and signaled him with a nod. Lemon Drop nodded in return and held his hoof out to Prism.

"Shall we?" he asked.

Prism raised an eyebrow at him. "Won't Raspberry get mad if you're dancing with some pony else?"

"Uh…" Lemon Drop said, glancing at his girlfriend, who pointed hastily at Kicks. "Yeah, but…she said it was okay if I kept dancing while she was gone, as long as it was with one of our friends."

"I don't know," Prism said, looking at all the couples dancing the tango. "Seems a bit… *intense* for my taste."

He looked to Raspberry for help. Glaring, she pulled Kicks in close and started dragging him across the dancefloor.

Closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, Lemon Drop said, "Sorry about this, Prism."

The pegasus filly cried out as Lemon Drop suddenly grabbed her hoof and pulled her in tight.

"Hey, what are you—?"

He cut her off by spinning her hard, sending her to the center of the dancefloor.

"What in the world has gotten into that colt?" Gemstone asked as he went off after Prism. "And what makes him think he can dance with Prism when he already has a girlfriend?"

Cherry shrugged. "Who knows?" Nervous, she took a step sideways closer to her. "The tango can, uh, make ponies do crazy things." She chuckled as she gazed out at the sea of dancing couples. "After

all, it's the, uh…most *intimate* kind of dancing there is."

"I know," Gemstone muttered, keeping her eyes on Lemon Drop and Prism.

Meanwhile, Raspberry was spinning Kicks about, pulling him into a sudden dip.

"Get the gist?" she asked.

Kicks nodded dumbly, then cried out as she pulled him back up. She glanced over at Lemon Drop, who was just a few feet away with Prism. The pegasus filly looked positively flustered from embarrassment.

"Now for the hoof-off," Raspberry said as she danced herself and Kicks over towards the other couple.

"Hoof-off?" Kicks asked.

With a smirk on her face, Raspberry grasped Kicks' hoof tightly and swung him outward, releasing him. Lemon Drop did the same with Prism, using his magic to make sure she spun in the correct direction. Both pegasi screamed at the sudden movement until they crashed into each other. Instinctively, Kicks held out his hooves and caught Prism's forelegs before she could collapse.

The two of them froze the second their eyes met.

They stood there a long while in bewilderment as tangoing couples circled them. Finally, Kicks took his gaze off Prism to look over at Raspberry. She gave him an encouraging smile as she took Lemon Drop's hoof with her left and put her right one on his waist, leading him into a dance.

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Kicks looked back at Prism, took her left hoof and put his right hoof on her waist. Prism stared at him in confusion as he started moving them across the floor. She remained silent as he spun her outward and then pulled her back in.

"Where did—?" she said, panting heavily. "How…what…?"

Kicks chuckled. "Believe me. I have no idea what I'm doing either."

Gemstone's eyes narrowed as she watched Kicks dance with Prism. Although it was unladylike, she let out a low growl as she clenched her front hooves. As more and more couples got onto the dancefloor, she began to lose sight of the two pegasus foals.

"W-Well," Cherry said, stepping closer to the unicorn, "I-looks like every pony else is tangoing." She rubbed the back of her neck. "Y-You know… *we* were pretty good dance partners during that project and…"

"Come on," Gemstone said, snatching her hoof.

Cherry yelped as she was yanked onto the dancefloor. Then she grinned brightly when she realized what was happening. Gemstone pulled her in and wrapped her other hoof around Cherry's waist.

"Do me a favor," Gemstone whispered, "and follow my lead."

The red filly squealed internally. "Lead on!"

Thrusting out their joined hooves, Gemstone led them through the crowd. Then another couple stepped into their path, making the unicorn grunt in annoyance.

"You know," Cherry said with a blush, "I've been practicing my dancing ever since…"

"So have I," Gemstone said bluntly.

She suddenly spun Cherry outwards, making her yelp. When Cherry came back into her partner's embrace, her mane was frazzled.

"Gee, Gem," Cherry said as she was tugged to the side. "You're being a little," she shrieked at their abrupt turn, "rough!"

Gemstone ignored her cries as she searched the room. Then she spotted her targets and smiled mischievously.

"Fair warning," Gemstone said to her friend, "I'm about to spin you again."

"Okay!" Cherry said excitedly, shutting her eyes.

The unicorn waited until there was a clear path. Then with a mighty swing of her foreleg, she threw Cherry across the room. Only she wasn't really spinning as much as falling backward. Opening her eyes, Cherry tried to regain her hoofing, but it was difficult considering she was only on two legs. Not seeing where she was going, she collided into Kicks, toppling him over. Both of them screamed while Prism looked down at them in alarm.

"Cherry? Kicks?" she said. "You two o—?"

She was cut off as her tail was suddenly yanked, spinning her around. Next thing she knew, she was in some pony else's embrace.

"Gem?" Prism asked in confusion.

Gemstone smiled at her, her eyelids drooping daintily. "May I have this dance?"

Hearing the cries, Raspberry and Lemon Drop turned to see what the matter was. The sight of Cherry lying backward over Kicks' stomach made them gasp. Then they looked up at the new dancing pair and gasped again. Blueberry, who was still over at the turntable, also gasped. Cinnamon Roll, who was over at the punchbowl, turned around and then dropped her glass.

They all watched as Gemstone led Prism in a tango, the former's eyes locked on the latter. She spun the confused pegasus outward and then pulled her in tightly. Cinnamon Roll blinked at the bewildering sight.

"W-Well," she said, clearing her throat. "Did *not* see that one comin'."

Meanwhile, Prism was utterly muddled as her best friend pulled her close.

"You know," Gemstone said, leading her into another spin, "they say tango is the most…"

Prism yelped as she was suddenly thrust into a dip. Gazing up at Gemstone's face, she saw a surprisingly… *sultry* look.

"… *intimate* of dances," the unicorn whispered.

Prism blinked. "Gem, what are you doing?"

Smirking, Gemstone brought her up, tightening her hold on Prism's back so that they were full up against each other.

"Can't a girl dance with the pony she adores?" the unicorn asked innocently.

The pegasus' eyes went wide as her face turned a beet red. "The pony she WHAT?!"

Instead of providing further explanation, Gemstone merely giggled and spun her again. Meanwhile, Kicks was trying to buck Cherry off his stomach.

"What's the big idea?" Kicks demanded.

"I didn't mean to!" Cherry shouted, rubbing her head. "It wasn't my __"

Her jaw dropped when she caught sight of Gemstone…and who she was dancing with. Cherry glanced between the two of them and saw the intense, burning look in the unicorn's eyes, a look she knew all too well. As Cherry's stare turned into a scowl, steam fumed from her nostrils, giving her the appearance of a raging bull.

"That brute doesn't deserve you, Prism," Gemstone said, a touch of venom in her voice as she dipped Prism again. " *No* colt deserves you."

Prism's lip quivered as she tried to find the words. *So* many questions were swimming in her head right now!

But before she could utter anything, there came a shout.

"YOU DIRTY TRAITOR!"

Gemstone and Prism looked over at Cherry, who was stomping towards them angrily. She grabbed Prism by the chest and hoisted her up to her face so that their snouts were touching. By this time, every pony had their eyes on them, including Lightning Dash and Aquafresh who had been conversing on the sidelines.

"YOU LITTLE FILLY THIEF!"

Prism was even more confused than ever. "What?"

"DON'T PLAY INNOCENT WITH ME!" Cherry shouted, giving her a hard shake. "YOU *KNEW* I LIKED GEMSTONE, DIDN'T YOU?! THOUGT YOU COULD *STEAL* HER FROM ME, DID YA?!"

" *Huh* ?!" Prism uttered.

"Hey, hooves off her!" Kicks cried, grabbing Cherry by the shoulders.

"Don't you touch her!" Gemstone shouted, snatching Prism's hoof.

They pulled the two fillies apart.

"What is wrong with you?" Kicks asked Cherry.

"She was trying to steal my girl!" the red filly said, flailing her hooves towards Prism.

"What? Don't be ridiculous!" He took Prism's other hoof. "Prism's not into fillies!"

Gemstone glared at the colt. "Let go of her, you brute!"

She tugged hardly on Prism. Kicks retaliated by tugging on her other hoof.

" *You* let go!" he shouted.

"No!" Gemstone insisted, pulling harder.

"Gem, it's okay!" Prism shouted. "He's not going to hurt—"

"HE DOESN'T DESERVE YOU LIKE I DO!"

There was a sharp record scratch as the entire room became still. Gemstone and Kicks stopped pulling Prism apart, which gave the pegasus filly time to process the situation. She glanced down at the hoof held by Kicks, then the hoof in Gemstone's. Then Prism looked back at Cherry, who was staring at Gemstone with teary eyes. Looking at Gemstone, Prism saw that she held a similar look… directed at *her* .

Kicks was also looking around, making similar observations. Gemstone glanced over at Cherry, noticing that her gaze was directed towards the white hooves closed tightly over the blue one.

Then the situation became clear to everyone.

Neither of them moved for the longest time, until Cherry finally burst into tears and rushed out of the room and up the stairs. Hearing her cries, Gemstone released Prism's hoof and took a step back.

"G-Gem?" Prism asked in concern.

Gemstone's gaze lowered. Prism followed her eyes to where Kicks was holding her hoof. He wasn't letting go, and Prism was making no attempt to leave.

The pegasus filly turned to her friend. "Gem…"

But the unicorn bolted across the room and out the door before any questions could be asked. Prism's mouth was open as she stared after her fleeing friend.

"You okay?" Kicks asked.

She looked down at his hooves holding hers. Then, shaking her head, she yanked her hoof away and walked sulkily off the dancefloor.

"Kid?" Lightning said as her sister came nearer.

Without lifting her eyes, Prism muttered, "Let's go home."

Nodding, Lightning wrapped her wing around her sister and then sent Aquafresh an apologetic look. Aquafresh nodded in

understanding and watched the two sisters slowly exit.

Meanwhile, Blueberry, Raspberry and Lemon Drop were standing together, glancing between the door and the stairs, unsure of who to follow.

"I'll go get her," Cinnamon Roll whispered as she passed the foals.

When the thirteen-year-old reached the stairs, the music started up again. DJ-Pon-3 probably did it to relieve every pony of the awkward tension. Taking a deep breath, Cinnamon Roll ascended to the second floor.

One door was open, and she could hear loud sobs. As she approached the room, her hooves stepped into a puddle, but she ignored it. Pushing the door open further, she found Cherry on her bed, two waterfalls spilling from her eyes.

Cinnamon Roll knocked lightly on the door to get the younger filly's attention. Cherry stopped her crying momentarily as she looked up. Cinnamon Roll sent her a sympathetic smile. With a sniff, Cherry wiped away her snot and plopped her face down into her pillow. The older filly stepped into the room and sat on the bed beside her.

"Sorry, Sugar," Cinnamon Roll murmured.

Without lifting her face, Cherry shook her head and said in a muffled voice, "It wasn't your fault."

She hung her head. "I feel like it was. See…Gem…told me she was here to impress some pony. A *she* . She was lookin' over at all of y'all and…I *assumed* she meant…"

Cherry craned her neck so that she could look at her. "You know? I've spent months hoping that…Gem might like fillies too." She sighed sadly. "Turns out she does. Just not…"

Cinnamon Roll laid a gentle hoof on her back. "I know it hurts. It hurt me when I realized Thunder Dash preferred my cousin over me. But…it gets better."

Cherry sat up. "How? *How* will it get better?"

The older filly shrugged. "Every pony heals in time, in their own way. Sometimes, it helps when there's some pony else there to make ya feel better."

"You mean," Cherry said, looking down thoughtfully, "a new crush?"

"Maybe," Cinnamon Roll said, facing her. "Sometimes, all ya really need is a friend."

"Huh," the younger filly said, looking up at her.

With a smile, Cinnamon Roll took her hoof. "And maybe a few dozen tons of Hearts and Hooves Day treats."

"Should one of us go check on her?" Cheese asked as he and his wife gazed up the stairs.

"I saw AJ's girl go up," Pinkie said. "And my Pinkie Sense isn't sensing any distress from one of our girls at the moment."

Cheese checked over his body. "Neither is my Cheesy Sense."

"Whatever that kid is saying to Cherry must be working."

Sure enough, Cinnamon Roll appeared with Cherry at the top of the stairs. Both were smiling and holding hooves as the older filly took the lead downstairs.

"What I tell ya?" Pinkie said as the two fillies passed by. "She may be adopted, but she's still Applejack and Spike's daughter!" She whispered to her husband. "They were always good at consoling ponies."

"Cherry!" Raspberry, Blueberry and Lemon Drop cried, running up to the two fillies.

"Are you okay?" Blueberry said. "I'm sorry, I didn't think anything like this would happen!"

"Yeah!" Raspberry said, narrowing her eyes. "Why didn't you tell me

you had a crush on Gemstone?!"

Cherry retorted, "Why didn't *you* tell us you were trying to set Kicks up with Prism?"

Raspberry opened her mouth and then shut it. "Touché."

"How are you feeling?" Lemon Drop asked.

"Honestly," Cherry said with a frown, "still icky." Then she grinned up at Cinnamon Roll. "But not so much anymore." She began pulling the older filly onto the dancefloor. "Come on, Cinny! Let's dance!"

Her sisters and Lemon Drop watched as Cherry got into the groove with Cinnamon Roll, the two of them laughing at their newfound friendship.

"She'll be fine," Blueberry said after a while.

"I ship it already," Raspberry said.

"Isn't Cinnamon Roll like thirteen or something?" Lemon Drop asked.

"Yeah, but that won't be much of a problem once Cherry hits eighteen." Raspberry let out a dreamy sigh as she put her hoof to her heart. "Love always finds a way."

"Speaking of which, should we…go and see if Prism and Gemstone are okay?"

"And say what exactly?" Blueberry said. "That you and Razz were trying to set Prism up with Kicks and that I was trying to set Cherry up with Gemstone, neither of us realizing Gemstone was concocting some wooing scheme of her own for Prism?"

The other two were silent for a long while.

"Wow," Raspberry said. "When you put it that way, my shipping heart is kinda torn. On one hoof, Kicks' crush on Prism is really cute, despite the whole ex-bully thing. On the other, Gemstone and Prism are the best of friends, so it's really no wonder one should start developing feelings for the other. So…who are we supposed to

ship?"

Silence again.

"I don't know about you," Lemon Drop said, "but I think we've done enough romantic meddling for one Hearts and Hooves Day."

"Agreed," Raspberry and Blueberry said, nodding.

"But…if Prism and Gemstone are in an… *awkward* situation," Blueberry said, biting her lip, "what does that mean…for the Cutie Mark Crusaders?"

Neither of them was brave enough to come up with an answer.

As Rarity passed by Gemstone's bedroom door, she was shocked to hear sobbing. Concerned, she knocked on the door.

"Gemstone?" she called. "Sweetie? Whatever is the matter?"

Her only answer was a distressed cry. "I DO NOT WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!"

Rarity stepped back from the door. *Perhaps I should check on her again a little later once she's calmed down.*

Inside, Gemstone was lying face-down on her bed, her makeup running as she cried her eyes out.

"Idiot!" she cried, pounding her head into the mattress. "Idiot, idiot, idiot!"

She turned her head towards her bedside table, where a portrait of the six Cutie Mark Crusaders sat. Using her magic, she brought it over to her face. She sat up to get a proper look at it. Her eyes fixated on Prism and herself on the far left, the former's hoof draped over the latter's shoulders.

More tears came to her eyes as they narrowed into a furious scowl.

CRACK!

The picture broke and the piece holding the image of Prism fell to the floor.

Sorry. No cutie mark reveal this time. Just...pre-teen romantic angst. The tango idea came from the April Fools episode of *Hey Arnold!*

So...who do YOU ship?